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Through Fire and Water.

BY FREDERICK TALBOT.

CHAPTER I.

"Oh, do but think
You stand upon the rivage, and behold
A city on the inconstant billows dancing."

ON the Temple Pier—high water, or thereabouts—the tide still hurrying strongly upward in mid-stream, but hanging lazily about the swirls and eddies by the shore; on the Temple Pier—time, Saturday, one hour past noon, and short of the ebb—stands a small group of persons apart from the crowd of river-farers who throng the floating platform.

It is a fine, breezy day, and there is a rare springtide flooding in. Great masses of muddy, effervescing waters twist and roll, seethe and boil, and flash the foaming crests of their brown wavelets under the eye of the yellow-visaged sun; and hurrying upward, too, upon the breast of this impetuous tide, all the fleet of the Thames share its throb and pulse.

The swart and noisy tug drags a long train of swinging barges at its tail; the high-piled hay-boat from the Medway drives crab-wise on its course, as fast as wind, and sail, and rushing tide, and massive sweep can carry it. Hoys and billy-boys are speeding on; gigs and wherries spin like tops upon their upward way. Steamers, too gay with pennons, crowded with holiday-makers, dash onward on the crest of the grand tidal wave; and the big Gravesend boat, with the black and white diamond funnel, quite a sea-going craft among this crowd of egg-shells, paddles majestically to her moorings. Giving voice, too, with lively brazen tongue, to all this stir and movement the band of the Royal Middlesex Rifles peals forth a gallant march; and on the deck

of the steamer *Citizen K*, now lying alongside the pier, are all the members and friends of the *Daily Mentor* Rowing Club; for this is the great fete day of the club, and they are all for Putney bound, with favoring wind and tide; and there shall be many races rowed in skiff and gig, in tiny wager boats and sharp, long-reaching "eight."

The group I mentioned just now consists of a man and woman, respectable people no doubt, but with nothing remarkable about them, and a girl, evidently their daughter. She is remarkable because she is beautiful. The pure and classical contour of her face, her

wealth of golden hair, her eyes of steadfast cerulean blue, her firm but ripe and dewy lips, her clear-cut chin, her figure, rounded, shapely, noble, would mark her anywhere as beautiful.

"Come now, if you're going," cried one of the pier men, preparing to cast off the gangway.

"Come along, Patty; we can't lose our trip along of your young man," cried the respectable-looking man.

"Oh, one half minute, father, one half minute!" There were distress, disappointment, disenchantment, in the girl's face as she turned away to the boat; and then, all of a sudden, it lightened up into a glow ineffable; her lips parted, her white teeth shone out, her eyes strained and stretched with watching, rounded with full glowing orbs. This mood, however, lasted for a moment only; and in the next she was the shy, coy maiden, and followed her parents obediently across the narrow gangway into the boat. But it was evident that he had come.

This little scene was watched with much interest and some amusement by a middle-aged man, who wore a light alpaca overcoat and straw-colored gloves—a man with a face good-humored if somewhat coarse, keen and intelligent eyes, mouth mobile but sensual, and light flowing beard and mustache. He was evidently an important man with the *Daily Mentor's* boat. The master of the steamer touched his hat to him; the printer's devils, redeemed



THERE WAS ONLY THE CHOICE BEFORE THEM—TO BURN OR TO DROWN!

and cleansed—who formed a little knot by the brow of the boat, nudged each other and whispered, "That's Mr. Bilfil." For Mr. Bilfil was a part proprietor of the *Daily Mentor*, and a great man in many ways.

But Mr. Bilfil frowned a little when he saw a good-looking youth spring from the pier, and, lightly leaping over the side-rails, place himself beside beautiful Patty.

"Oh, we'd quite given you up, Mr. Hulse," said the young lady, in the most indifferent tone she could assume.

"I'm late, am I not? but I couldn't help it. The chief nailed me just as I was starting, and kept me jawing with him for ten minutes. I've had such a run. I'm afraid something will go crack, I'm palpitating so."

"You haven't got anything the matter with your heart, I hope, Mr. Hulse?" said Robinson—he was a compositor in the *Daily Mentor* office—looking round and winking.

Patty tossed her head. It was not in this way such subjects should be approached.

Edward Hulse was a young man of two or three-and-twenty years, who had served his articles with Messrs. Paston and Brett, solicitors, the former being his uncle, and was now employed by them at a salary as a clerk. His father was old Fleetwood Hulse, the agent of the South of England Drain-pipe and Tile Company, a man who had seen better—that is, more prosperous—days. Edward lived with his father and mother and his sister Lucy in a house by the river-side, belonging to the Drain-pipe Company, lying close to their wharf—the Ebbsfleet wharf and warehouse. He was decidedly superior in social status to the Robinsons. Both they and he felt it, and were uncomfortable in consequence. Patty, by herself, was glorious, delightful; but Patty, with papa and mamma in company, was still beautiful, still charming, but—well, a little flat.

Edward knew that he was doing a very foolish thing in the estimation of all his sensible friends. He had made Patty's acquaintance in an unorthodox way, helping her over a crossing one day in the city; and fascinated by her beauty, he had improved his opportunities and there was no doubt—Patty had no doubt—that he was very much in love with her. But each had felt it to be a crucial test when she invited him to join them on this excursion up the river. To appear as Patty's lover before her father and mother was quite a different thing from those delightful surreptitious walks, when he would lie in wait for her as she returned to her home in Trinity Square, and would take one or two delightful turns with her round the Tower Gardens. There, was mystery, romance; here, plain prosaic matter of fact. It was a serious thing, this trip on the river, to Master Edward. It meant making up his mind; it meant being asked as to his "intentions;" it meant making a plunge downward in the social scale; it meant owning for *beaux-parents* a somewhat vulgar printer and his wife, who let lodgings in Trinity Square, Tower Hill. Now he was a prudent youth, and very much of a Philistine, and was in the habit of looking ahead; and he didn't like all this. But he was fascinated and enthralled by Patty, and he could do no less.

Nevertheless, when Robinson *pere* asked him about his "art," he shuddered.

But Patty was a girl of tact and nerve, and was quite alive to the difficulties of the position. She neatly brought her father into contact with Parkins, who always engaged him in a political discussion, and, after placing her mamma in a comfortable seat near the boiler, led her lover to the fore part of the boat.

"Let us go into the stern, Patty; there is nobody there, and we can have a capital talk there. I hate being in a crowd."

Now, although there was not any regulation on the subject, yet it was well understood that the after part of the boat was reserved for the proprietors of the *Daily Mentor*, their friends, and any of the superior staff who might care to join the party. Consequently Patty hesitated when Edward asked her to go aft with him.

"I don't think it would be liked," she said; "I don't think we have any business there."

A quick look of impatience crossed Edward's face. Again he knew himself in a false position, again felt the gall of social prejudice.

"You won't mind staying with me a little while," said Patty, looking at him meekly. "When we get to Putney you can go ashore and see your fine friends, and leave poor me to myself."

"I'll stay with you any where, always," whispered Edward, fervently, in her ear, ashamed of himself for his short fit of ill temper. But his equanimity was more sorely tried when, shortly afterward, the burly Mr. Bilfil pushed his way to where they were standing.

"Why, Patty," he said, "you're getting prettier and prettier every day."

Patty was pleased with the notice and flattery of Mr. Bilfil. He was to her a prince, the great man of her little world.

"And you've got your sweetheart too, I see. Silly girl, silly girl! if you only knew when you are well off!"

Edward grew hot and furious, and yet didn't know how to resent his tone of superiority. Heroics were out of place; still, to be sat upon by this fat, straw-colored man was unendurable. Just then they touched Waterloo Pier.

"Has the *George Peabody* gone up? shouted a man who had just rushed on to the pier.

"Ain't seen 'im; I'd a 'looked 'im if I 'ad," cried one of the pier-men, who was prodding with his boat-hook at a bundle of brown paper which was circling in an eddy at the pier-side.

"Yes, she's gone," shouted another.

"They shouldn't call boats by masculine names," remarked Mr. Bilfil; "one gets confused in one's genders. Hullo, Markwood, what brings you here?—you aint a *Mentor* man?"

Markwood was the man who had been inquiring for the *George Peabody*, and who, finding he, or she, had passed, had leaped on board *Citizen K*, the *Mentor* boat.

"No, captain," cried Markwood, "I've got a little bit of respectability left about me, thank goodness; but I don't mind being seen in your company as far as Putney. I want to see a youngster of mine pull in the London eight.—Hullo, Ned," he said, "you here?"

Markwood was a man whom everybody liked. He was a confidential clerk to Messrs. Paston and Brett, and knew as much of law as a Thames waterman, but he was up to everything else. Did you want a bull-pup or a seat in parliament, Markwood would introduce you to the man who would provide you with either. He knew all about the crews for the next boat-race, could tell you their weights to an ounce, their styles and capabilities. He would put you on to a good outsider for the Derby; he could tell you about the picture M. was painting, or the book that N. was writing. Always doing a good turn for somebody, he had always time to do another good turn for somebody else. A genial companion over pipes and grog, a tender, capable friend by a sick-bed, there was no one who had known John Markwood who hadn't felt the better for him, who didn't keep a kindly memory of him in his heart. Ned Hulse had been a great pet of his; and when he saw him philandering with a pretty girl, an honest girl too, though not of his own standing, he looked grave and pained. He called Edward to one side, and they thus left Patty under the care of Mr. Bilfil.

"Look here, Ned," he whispered; "is that a girl you could introduce to your sister Lucy—as your future wife? Tell me yes, honestly, and I've not another word to say except wishing you well."

"But it isn't a question of future wife," said Ned, pettishly.

"Then it ought to be. You can't go about with a girl like that without compromising yourself and her. You ain't a swell, you know, Ned, who can flare away making fools of anybody you please; and if you were such a d—d rogue," said Markwood, "by Jupiter, I'd disown you!"

"Do you think," muttered Edward, "that I'd do any wrong to the girl? There, look at her, Markwood; isn't she a d—d creature?"

She had turned round to look after her truant lover; she had tired of Bilfil, his persiflage, his wit; she had cut short some of his innuendoes, but she couldn't quarrel with the man—he was her father's master. So she looked imploringly round to Edward, and he couldn't choose but answer the summons.

Markwood's face puckered up into wrinkles, and then he smiled through his eyes.

"The old story," he said to himself. "They will do it."

CHAPTER II.

"Why, give him gold enough, and marry him to a puppet."

THE late Gilbert Paston, of Brimover Gardens, Kensington, formerly of Ebbsfleet, City, and 675 Borough, merchant and general contractor, was the son of a Kentish grazier holding large tracts of land in Romney Marsh, who added to his profits by dealing in corn and hops. The grazier had three sons, of whom Gilbert was the second born. The eldest succeeded to the land; the youngest, Tom, was placed with a solicitor in Canterbury, where in due time he migrated to London, and founded the respectable firm of Paston and Brett. Gilbert took to the corn-and-hop trade. An unacknowledged but lucrative branch of this business was smuggling. Nearly all the inhabitants of Romney Marsh were at that time more or less engaged in the contraband trade. Gilbert thus acquired early an initiation into all the secrets of that dangerous traffic; and when he afterward increased his ventures, and took a warehouse in the Borough and another in Lower Bridge street, and became a prosperous London merchant, there were not wanting ill-natured people who said that Paston still retained a considerable interest in "free trade." Gilbert, however, knew well that in such matters boldness was the true prudence. A few years of successful ventures, carried on with all the resources of capital and intimate knowledge of the forces opposed to him, gave him a considerable fortune, with which he wisely retired, and devoted the rest of his life to securing and increasing his hoard by judicious investments. He was a penurious man, who lived, nevertheless, in a good house and kept good company. He was always ready with a liberal donation for a church or a school, and his name was on the committees of management of most of the hospitals and charities of London. On his relatives he never spent a copper. His eldest brother, who had lived a profuse life as a man enjoying a safe and sufficient income, had been ruined by free trade, or possibly free living, and a fall in prices. A small fund was raised to support him; Gilbert would not contribute a penny. Later on, however, when his brother died, and left a daughter, Margaret, completely unprovided for, Gilbert so far broke through his principles as to take her into his home as house-keeper. As she received no wages, however, and earned her clothes by giving morning lessons in music in the neighborhood, the arrangement was not an unprofitable one for Gilbert. Still he grudged her small expenses of living, and was terrified at the thought that he would have to provide for her at his death.

In Gilbert Paston that peculiar outcome of the love of life which urges men to perpetuate their names in the most lasting way their wits can devise, so that they may not altogether die out, but still leave their dead hands outstretched over the living world, had become paramount. This not unnatural desire had so strongly ingrained itself into his nature that he looked upon any expenditure which detracted from his darling schemes as so much waste. He was determined that he would live to future ages as Gilbert Paston the philanthropist. By a strange sarcasm of Fate he has alone been remembered as Paston the miser.

Gilbert Paston's house in Kensington was the not infrequent resort of literary men and artists. He had some capital specimens of the Dutch masters. He would buy a picture, too, of the modern school, if he saw a good value for his money. He had acquired a sufficient

technical knowledge of pictures. He was a shrewd hard-headed thinker and good talker. To smoke for an hour with old Paston, who at any time after seven o'clock might be found in his library, sitting bolt-upright in a straight-backed chair, smoking a long clay, and sipping weak Schiedam-and-water, was a recognized custom with many litterateurs and artists. After Margaret came the practice increased. Margaret was undeniably good-looking, had an instinctive dramatic talent, while her early bringing up had imbued her with ideas refreshingly naive and original.

There was a square leaden tank on a slab in one corner of the room which was always full of excellent Knaster tobacco; beside it was a square fat bottle of hollands; and Gilbert Paston still kept up sufficient communication with his old Dutch correspondents to insure the excellence of these two commodities. The tobacco and hollands were free to all comers, but no farther hospitality was ever known to be offered to the guest of Gilbert Paston.

Bilfil, a man well known both to city and newspaper people, was often a visitor at Paston's, and after a time declared himself as Margaret's suitor. He was the confidential adviser of the great discounting firm of Grindrod and Gordon. He was also connected with the *Daily Mentor*, started to represent the interests of commerce, which the great firm had supported by a considerable loan.

Margaret had already had love passages with her cousin, Edward Hulse. But she cast him off without remorse when a serious suitor presented himself.

To Margaret the position she held was so irksome that she was ready to turn a favorable ear to any proposals which would relieve her from it. She didn't stop to consider that in every depth there is still a lower one; that to a young and handsome woman there is a vast balance of hope under the most unfavorable circumstances. She snatched at the first opportunity of escape from her uncle's protection. A union contracted with little feeling on either side, and little knowledge of mutual character, could only accidentally be a happy one. The lucky accident did not occur. Margaret was forced to own that, of all bitter bread of dependence, that received from a husband who is indifferent and unkind is the sourest and bitterest crust of all.

Had things turned out as Bilfil intended they should, their married life would have been much more prosperous. He had not ventured on this step without endeavoring to ascertain Paston's views with regard to his niece, and here his own acuteness had deceived him.

"What I have, Mr. Bilfil," Gilbert told him, "I sha'n't part with till I die, but Margaret will have all the money I have to leave among my relations. But don't you build on that; don't sit waiting for my shoes. You and Margaret start in a quiet way; where there's room for one, there's room for two. I sha'n't forget you, depend on it."

But Bilfil had farther grounds for his assurance that Margaret would inherit a considerable portion of her uncle's property. He had called one day on Paston, and had found him closeted with his lawyer; and sitting down to wait till he was disengaged, he saw in Paston's bold characters, written on a scrap of paper:

MEMORANDA FOR THE DISPOSITION OF MY PERSONALITY.

Margaret to have	£150,000,
Thomas " "	20,000,
Guy " "	5,000.

On that hint he spoke. He had been doubtful before; now his course was clear. Gilbert's health was failing; his life could not be a long one. How altered would be Margaret's position if Paston should chance to die before she were firmly bound to him, Bilfil.

They were married quietly, and Bilfil took lodgings for his bride in South Kensington, that she might be near her uncle. Gilbert did not long survive. One day, while he was at the Drain-pipe Company's office—he had a considerable interest in that concern, which had taken a lease of his old warehouse—while he was look-

ing through the books of the company, he had a paralytic seizure, and was carried home insensible. From that time he never recovered the full use of his faculties. He tried hard to speak, but could only give forth strange, uncouth sounds. As life ebbed away he recovered for a while the partial use of one of his hands, and contrived to scrawl upon a slate—Ebbsfleet.

Nothing more. Nobody knew what he meant; and in trouble and anxiety, and unavailing efforts to make himself understood, the rich man passed away. When his will was read it was found that, with the exception of a legacy of five hundred pounds to his niece Margaret, and a hundred to his old servant Mary, all his property was bequeathed to charities, principal among which was St. Margaret's Home for Incurable Idiots, which received £150,000.

Among the disappointed expectants of the old man's bequests, few, after Bilfil, felt their loss more keenly than Fleetwood Hulse, the manager of the Drain-pipe Company. He had married Paston's half-sister; and although there was no friendship between the men, yet Gilbert had obtained for him the appointment he held, and he had always expected that at least the interest which Paston possessed in the company would be left to him. He had for years counted upon these shares as practically his own. His position in the company's service had been favorably affected by the probability that he would eventually become one of its chief proprietors. Bitter was his disappointment, sad the fruits of his unfounded expectations.

CHAPTER III.

"Come on; in this there can be no dismay—
My ships come home a month before the day."

THE old house by the riverside, which was the official residence of the manager of the South of England Drain-pipe and Tile Company—henceforth to be cited for all purposes, as the acts of Parliament say, as the Drain-pipe Company—although not adapted for fashionable entertainments, was still a snug and comfortable residence. The ground-floor was occupied by the offices of the company, and therefore the dining-room took the place of the old drawing-room; so that it was a custom when you dined with the Hulses for the male portion of the guests to retire instead of the ladies, and to betake themselves to a little room higher up, where tobacco was freely smoked. Or on fine summer evenings they would perhaps adjourn to the old warehouse, where a wooden balcony projected over the river some twenty feet above the water at high tide. The Hulses dined always at six, and in a very comfortable way. A bell would be rung half an hour before dinner—a bell which sounded in the yard of the warehouse, and was incidentally useful to the carters and wagoners as reminding them of the approach of the time for knocking off work. Mr. Hulse was somewhat of a tyrant in his own house. If by six o'clock prompt the whole of his guests had not assembled, there would be black looks on his part till the cloth was removed. When, therefore, as on the present occasion, Edward had not returned by the time the dressing-bell rung, his mother and sister were always nervously anxious lest he should be late for dinner. He had been late several times within the last few weeks without being able to give a satisfactory account of himself, and there had been hot words in consequence.

Lucy Hulse, a girl as fair and white as a snowdrop, whose clear marble shoulders shone all the clearer and whiter for the contrast of a low black silk dress trimmed with violet—Lucy was standing at the window which looked out into the quiet street. The street was wonderfully quiet, considering that it was in the very heart of the city, and that close by pulsated one of the great arteries of English life. A rumbling dray now and again woke the echoes. Sometimes a random cab bound for some sea-going steamer rattled by, but otherwise no sound broke the stillness.

Lucy Hulse had been reared up within hearing of Bow-bells in as

much quietude and seclusion as a maiden of the remotest country village. Once a year, indeed, she would go to see her aunt, a spinster who lived in lodgings in a little hamlet in Wiltshire, surrounded by great chalk deserts—deserts fruitful, indeed, of swedes and oats, but barren of mankind. Here, in a little thatched cottage covered with clematis and honeysuckle, would Lucy endure her annual penitential "change of air." Sometimes, but very rarely of late, her brother Edward would take her from the "Old Swan" Pier up or down the river, but for these excursions she didn't care much. She shrank from the loud noise of a crowd, and was always glad to return to the quiet shades of Lower Bridge Street. She had a wonderful garden there upon the leads looking over the yard, a dove-cote hard by, and chickens down in a little house penned off from the stable. These last were white Dorkings, and she was very proud of her massive-toed pets, who picked and pecked among the pipes and tiles, and came in for many a stray handful of oats from the carters. Up to the last year or two Edward had kept rabbits in the yard, but he had given that up since he had passed his examination and become a full-fledged solicitor, and the only survivor of the flock was a beautiful white doe, which ambled about the yard, and popped in and out of the drain-pipes as she willed.

Lucy Hulse was a regular and devout attendant at the quiet City church of St. Saveall's, where she had an aisle all to herself, and did most of the responses. Fleetwood Hulse rarely went out. Sometimes he would go and see his friend Simball, the clerk of the Fishmongers' Company; but for the most part, when not in his office, he would spend long hours reclining in his easy-chair, with his yellow bandana over his face, possibly thinking of the better days, either past or to come. He was always kind to Lucy, who loved him very much; but he was a stern disciplinarian with his son, who, nevertheless, had a great respect and affection for the "governor."

Lucy Hulse, her head laid close against the window, was looking sideways up the street, hoping every moment to see her brother. Her father came in and cast a critical glance at the dinner-table, busing himself in decanting some wine.

"Has Edward come in?"

"No, papa; but he won't be long, I think."

"Long, indeed! It was only yesterday I told him I would have him in the house before the bell rung. He shall have no dinner at my table."

"Papa, perhaps he's detained on business."

"Fiddle-sticks! With proper arrangement no man need be late for dinner, business or no business. Did you ever know me late for dinner?"

"But it's different with you, papa; and you know Edward is very good."

"Good! he's no more manners than a pig. I'm ashamed of him for a son of mine; yes, I am, Lucy, ashamed! He shall dine in the kitchen if he's not home before the clock strikes the quarter; yes, I say he shall!"

Hulse went off mumbling and grumbling. Lucy renewed her watch, pressing her head closer and closer against the pane the faster the moments flew. At last the big old clock in the yard gave a sort of premonitory choke, as a signal he meant striking.

"Oh!" said Lucy, with a cry of vexation.

"Boh!" said a voice behind, the owner of which caught her in her arms as she started back.

"Oh, John, how you frightened me!"

"Then I'll give you a kiss to re-assure you. By Jove, how nice you look! that dress suits you wonderfully, Lucy."

John was a dark, thick-set man, with a square, good-humored face, bright eyes deeply set, black curly hair. You would have known him as a clergyman by his garb, as a Welshman by his accent, and as Lucy's lover probably by his way of going on.

He was, indeed, the curate of St. Saveall's

Church—the curate in charge. He was the son of Archdeacon Jones, of Pumptrisant, of a younger branch of the Joneses of Tyglas, which branch is supposed to be of the very best and most *recherche* blood of all the Joneses.

Till nineteen Lucy Hulse had lived on her life without a lover, if you except the office boy for the time, who was changed so often that he hadn't any time to make an impression upon her heart. She knew that men existed, for she saw them on the streets and on the tops of omnibuses. Otherwise she was as ignorant of the world of mankind as Miranda on her father's solitary and enchanted island.

Then in the most surprising manner this lover, this hero, this demi-god, appeared upon the scene. He had made a pastoral call, having found out from the verger the address of the fair young girl who attended so regularly on his ministrations. He had come again and again, and at last had proposed to marry Lucy, and she had with much trepidation consented, so that he was now on the familiar footing of a lover. And thus it was that, finding herself in his arms, Lucy did not scream or faint, but accepted his warm salute with as little demur as could be expected from so pure and sweet a maid.

Everybody thought that Lucy was a very lucky girl to have secured such an eligible sweetheart, for the man was of good connections and prospects. The living of Pumptrisant, worth a good five hundred a year, with only fifty parishioners, and one of the best trout streams in Wales in its bounds, was in his godfather's gift, and the present incumbent was eighty-five years old.

"Ned not home yet! Oh, what a shocking fellow? Who's coming to-night?"

"Only old Mr. Simball, and Mr. Evan Pugh, of the United Bank."

"What, is Evan coming? Dear, I'm glad of that."

"Yes, only, John"—

"Well?"

"You're not to talk Welsh. Poor Mr. Simball nearly had a fit that day you burst out with all that Welsh. 'Vocal fire-works,' he called it afterward."

"Fire-works, indeed!" said John. "He'd better not let Evan hear him."

"Is Evan so very formidable, then?"

"I should think so; he comes of a fighting family, does Evan. As a rule we are wonderfully peaceable folks, but here and there you meet with a fighting family, and the Pughs of Tredol were always famous for it."

"But he wouldn't hurt poor old Simball, that meek quiet old man?"

"No. Not him, but his son perhaps, or his nephew, eh? Evan would never rest till he'd found out somebody belonging to him who could fight, and then he'd go into him. But he's one of the best-hearted fellows under the sun, is Evan Pugh; yes, indeed."

The dinner-bell rang, and Edward hadn't come. Just as the soup was being carried away he came in, hot and excited. Markwood was with him.

"Father, I've brought Mr. Markwood in to dinner. I knew you'd be glad to see him."

"Hum!" said the old man. "I suppose you were afraid to come in alone."

Markwood, however, soon made the old man's face relax, and the somewhat gloomy dinner-table grew cheerful with his stories. Every one but Pugh joined in the flood of talk; he sat severely and austere by. Pugh was a great hand at stories himself, but as the point of them usually consisted in the diverse accentuation of a Welsh vowel, they were for the most part caviare to the multitude.

"Can your friend fight?" he whispered to Edward.

Edward nodded. "First-rate," he whispered, in reply.

"Confound it!" said Pugh, under his breath. "If he's good at that too, I don't know where I will have him."

"Pugh," said Fleetwood Hulse, as the men of the party proposed to adjourn for a smoke, "stay a few moments, will you, and help me

to finish this bottle of port? I want your advice."

Pugh staid behind.

"Come, Pugh, fill your glass! Now, I want to talk to you about a little matter of business. You know my daughter's going to marry Jones—a very suitable match, we think it; good prospects, and all that."

"Yes, indeed, and a very good-hearted fellow he is, too; yes, by Jove!"

"No doubt, no doubt," said Fleetwood, waiving that aside as unimportant. "Well, in order to do honor to the occasion, and give my daughter a trousseau and all that, befitting the position to which she was born—for I needn't tell you, Pugh, that the Fleetwood Hulses are a family with which it would be no degradation for princes to ally themselves; you understand me, Pugh; no brag, you know, but just a simple matter of fact."

"All right," said Pugh; "and a very good-hearted girl she is, too; yes, indeed."

"But, you see, my dear Pugh, all these things cost a lot of money—lot of money. Now I have some money laid by with our Company, on call, as it were, on which they pay me interest, and I proposed to draw some of that out, three hundred pounds or so."

"Just so, quite right. I admire your prudence," said Pugh.

"But our managing director called me on one side, and said, 'Hulse, my boy,' said he—he's a Blackman of the Blackmans of Longshenstone, and knew me in better days, and so it's Jack and Harry with us still—'Fleetwood,' said he, 'our balances are devilish low just now—these were his very words—'draw upon us at three months, and discount the bill in the city.' I couldn't do less than oblige them. Here's the bill."

Hulse drew a case from his pocket, and pulled out a small oblong piece of paper. Pugh examined it.

"Ah, I see; drawn by John Jones. That's our John." Hulse nodded without speaking. "Accepted by Edward Hulse, and indorsed by the Company. Well?"

"Well, I didn't send it up with the other bills to be discounted."

"Quite right, too," said Pugh. "I should have looked curiously upon that bill."

"Why?" said Hulse, with a start, leaning forward and taking up the bill.

"Pig upon Bacon, don't you see? Accommodation bill. I should have thought the Company was in a hole, you see; quite erroneously in this case; but, as a rule, if there's anything 'fishy' about a bill, don't take it to your banker's."

"But there's nothing fishy about this," said Fleetwood Hulse, snappishly.

"Dear, no, it's a very good bill—of the sort; only get it discounted outside if you want the money. You won't pay any more; perhaps not so much."

"Could you introduce me to anybody who would discount it for me?"

"There's Bacon and Bilfil, Birchin Lane; they do a good deal in that way; they're rather high, but you don't mind that so much, I dare say. They'll do it for you in a twinkling, I've no doubt. I'll give you a note of introduction to them."

"Thank you," said Hulse. "Of course I don't want it known to anybody."

"Of course not. You can depend on my secrecy; it's part of my business."

Meantime Edward, his future brother-in-law, and Markwood had gone to the old warehouse to smoke. The pile of buildings known as Ebbsfleet form a quadrangle of which the river is one of the sides; a warehouse which abuts on the river makes another side; stables and a wide entrance-gate the third; while the square is completed by the house and offices which face the warehouse, and whose doors open into the inclosed yard. When the big gates are shut, Ebbsfleet is cut off from the rest of the world—except on the river side, from which come no visitors but rats. And at nights, when the noise of traffic has died away, Ebbsfleet is wrapped in deep conventual stillness. The whole of the river

frontage was occupied, of course, by the wharf, except where the warehouse abutted: for the building overhung the river, its foundations being based upon piles driven into the river-bed and the wooden balcony overhung still more. A creaking, rusty old crane was in the apex of the gable end of the warehouse, and a rope which was never used hung half-way down. The warehouse was of wood, and almost ruinous; it was never used by the Company, for their wares were too weighty to be stored on rickety floors. A corner of it, however, was of brick and cement, very strongly built. And this one strong portion had given firmness and strength to the rest of the building, which leaned upon it for support. It was a darksome, drearish place, that old warehouse, at night. When, knowing that no other living human soul was in the place, you heard a mad rush of hurrying feet on the floor over your head, though reason told you they were only the feet of rats, you still shivered and shuddered. When the creaking, rusty crane moaned dolefully in the passing wind—when you heard the plash, plash of the hurrying waters under your feet—when, in fact, all the noises of the night combined to make that dreary old warehouse alive with eerie sounds—it was a very darksome, drearish place to be alone in.

"Ugh!" said John, who entered it for the first time; "what a vaulty kind of place, and what a vaulty kind of smell! It feels as though a murder had been done here."

"Nonsense," said Edward, who didn't like to hear his favorite bower run down. "Come out here into the balcony; you can see well enough, for the night is not dark, and the lamps of the steamers and the glow from the sky lighten it up."

"But it was chilly on the balcony, and so Edward lit a stable lantern, and took them into a little room he had fitted up as a workshop, where the windows were not more than half broken, and where there was a bench he had made himself; which, but that it "carried" one of its legs, and would ruthlessly upset an incautious sitter the moment that he sat down, was a very favorable specimen of the carpenter's art. Of this bench Edward was justly proud.

"Come, Markwood, come, old fellow, we can be very jolly here. Light up! Sit down here; you'll find it very comfortable, only we must all sit down at once, or else it will tilt over. Now, all together!"

"Good Heavens, Ned!" cried John Jones, springing forward and destroying the balance of the bench. "Listen? What's that?"

From the very top of the old warehouse there was a sound of a shuffling of feet and a clanking of chains; then, as they listened, the sound descended; stair by stair they heard the shuffling feet, the clanking chain; louder and louder grew the noise, nearer and nearer came the shuffling feet, till at last, as John, holding up the lantern, cowered into the farthest corner of the little room, he saw, far up in the black darkness of the long low room beyond, two shining flame balls.

"Ha, ha!" said Edward, laughing heartily. "It's old Scipio! My word, you were frightened, John. I forgot you hadn't been introduced to Scipio. Come here, old fellow!"

The two shining eyes approached, and presently, as he came within the scope of the rays of the lantern, a big rough-coated dog, whose muzzle and throat were white with age, whose massive jowl overhung his gaping jaws, who seemed as though he could scarcely drag one trembling limb after the other, shuffled slowly toward the light. A broken chain hung from his collar. He struck his head against the half-opened door and recoiled.

"Upon my word, that's a very uncanny dog of yours, Ned!"

"He's blind, poor fellow. Here, come here! Try again, Scipio!"

Scipio gave his great tail a sweep as he heard his master's voice; but when he entered the room he snuffled all about until he got scent of the strangers, when he put his mouth to the ground and growled ominously.

"I should kill that dog if I were you, Ned, he's useless and worn out," said the curate.

The dog seemed to understand what was said, and growled again.

"Quiet, Scipio! You shouldn't say such things before him, John. He's a powerful dog still, and I think, although his teeth are mostly gone, he could give a good account of any man living."

"But what's the good of him?" said Jones.

"What's the good of you, if it comes to that?" said Markwood. "As long as Ned has a roof to cover him, Scipio will be taken care of. Why, he saved Ned's life when he was a child. Ned tumbled off the wharf, and Scipio was sitting in the balcony and saw him, and dived down after him—twenty feet or more he jumped."

"Yes, but that was a long time ago. He's no use now!"

"Oh, isn't he any use?" said Edward. "Just you stay in that room for a minute, while Markwood and I come out. Now, Scipio! Guard him!"

Scipio flung himself majestically into the doorway. John Jones tried to step over him. Suddenly springing up, with crest erect, his jaws distended, his sightless eyes flashing fire, he roared rather than growled at the escaping prisoner, and would have thrown himself upon him, but that Edward seized him by the collar and held him down.

"Get away, John, get away. I never saw Scipio like this before. Down, sir, down! Let him go, Scipio; let him go!"

John Jones fled precipitately from the warehouse, and didn't feel safe till he had put the front-door of Hulse's house between him and the dog.

"Poor old Scip!" said Markwood, caressing his massive head. "Poor old boy! you didn't like the parson, eh? Well, upon my word, Ned, I didn't either."

CHAPTER IV.

"This 'tis to be married! this 'tis to have linen and buck-baskets!"

PASTON and Brett's, in term time, is more like a legal factory than an ordinary solicitor's office. There is a big room on the ground-floor full of clerks. Markwood had the command on this floor. Higher up you came to Paston's own sanctum, jealously guarded. If you weren't uncommonly self-assertive, you would drift away here, if you came in search of Mr. Paston—that is, if you were not a swell at all, but only ordinary Brown or Jones. Mr. Paston had the theory that the most valuable thing in the world to him was his own time, and that any people worth seeing would find their way to him past any difficulties his men could throw in their way; so he rather encouraged his inaccessibility, and made dreadful war among his clerks if any worthless—in Mr. Paston's sense—client filtered through their sieve.

In vacation time, however, Paston and Brett's rests on its oars. Paston is probably at Rome or Florence. As for Brett, he is in Bedford Row still, no doubt, burrowing among the passages below the basement; but then nobody acknowledges Brett as anybody. The managing clerk is putting his garden in order at Dalston. Markwood is paddling about at Kingston or Henley with his boys.

It is in the middle of the long vacation, about three months after Mr. Hulse's dinner-party, that a lady dressed in deep mourning and closely veiled, drives up in a cab to Paston and Brett's. She dismisses the cabman, and timidly rings the bell at the outer door. Now, to ring the bell at No. 85 Bedford Row is somewhat equivalent to the pastime of the child—rendered memorable to us by the witticism of Sydney Smith—in stroking the shell of a tortoise. It doesn't produce the slightest effect in the internal economy of the office. The bell sounds lustily enough, but no one takes any notice of it. So this black figure stands forlornly conspicuous in the desert of Bedford Row, patiently awaiting the result of the summons; rings again more impetuously—still stands there waiting. This little obstacle worries and frets her; how

is she to make the people hear in this dull old place? Just as she is putting her hand to the bell for the third time a young man pushes open the swing-door and issues forth. He sees a lady standing there; stops and recognizes her. Presently they are both swallowed up by the swing-doors. We will follow them into the house, up the stairs. They pass into Mr. Paston's comfortably furnished inner room, when the lady removes her veil, disclosing features regular and handsome, but colorless and cheerless, without the light of happy life upon them.

"My uncle is abroad, you tell me," she said listlessly, leaning her head upon her hand, and mechanically smoothing the band of hair upon her forehead. "I am very sorry. I wanted his advice, and I know not where to go, to whom."

"Although," said the young man, whom we recognize as Edward Hulse, compressing his lips firmly, "it must be painful to both of us to renew an acquaintance broken off under such cruel circumstances, yet if I can help you in any way"—

"I know it," she said; I know you will; but if our meeting be painful to you, how much the more must it be to me? You, at least, have nothing to reproach yourself with; you are contented, happy; but for me, miserable creature that I am! But after all, Edward," she went on, with more energy, "I have not injured you; you never really cared for me; you thought you did, but you were mistaken. I led you on to believe you were in love with me, but it was mere illusion. You have already consoled yourself, have you not? Confess."

Edward, somewhat embarrassed by the turn the conversation had taken, bit his lips and remained silent.

"And so," she went on, "as you have ceased to care for me, I can, without compunction, tell you my troubles, and ask your advice, just as a client, you know, Edward. You don't know my husband, you don't know Bilfil, but you know that I married against the wishes of my Uncle Tom—indeed of everybody, except Uncle Gilbert. But I was young and foolish, and didn't know what I was about. A worse man in every sense does not exist. And yet he is flattered, courted by everybody; while I—Hardly had we been married a month before he recommenced his old career. Haunter of all kinds of infamous places, he comes to his home reeking with the contagion of the coarse, evil natures with whom he associates. No, he is not personally unkind to me, he is only obnoxious. He is the guest at many good houses where the existence of his wife is not even acknowledged; he makes not the slightest effort to introduce me to the society of my equals. He proposed to me the other day to take me to some one of his vile haunts—some music-hall, I imagine. He tells me to my face that he made a mistake; that he thought I was the rich Miss Paston, the heiress to old Gilbert Paston, the miser; and that he regrets ever having met me. Now what can I do? where can I go? My whole nature, my very being, is sullied by contact with such a man. Where can I go? What can I do? Will the law protect me?"

"I'm afraid it won't," said Edward, gloomily.

"Can I make use of the little fortune that is mine to set myself up in some business where I can earn an honest living?"

Edward shook his head.

"If I leave him, can he compel me to return to him?"

"I fear—that is, I have no doubt—he can."

"Then," she said, rising and moving toward the door with tottering limbs, "I shall throw myself into the river."

"Stop," said Edward, interrupting her. "I think I can help you in another way. The law, indeed, gives you no help, but human sympathy is broader than law. I would not advise you to return to a man of the kind you describe. Leave him; let him remain ignorant of your fate. London is almost trackless; you are as safe from him here—except for the barest accident—as you would be thousands of miles away. I know some nice respectable people living near

the Tower; they will give you shelter for a week or two."

"But I have no money, no clothes. Oh no, I can't."

"I will let you have some money, and as for clothes, well, you must go—home, and pack them up; enough for your present wants."

"But if he is there?"

"You must wait till he is gone."

"And perhaps he will stay—stay all night; he does sometimes; and if he did I should kill him. Edward, yes, I would kill him!"

"Hush, hush! We must manage it in this way: I will go with you in a cab, and will ask for your husband; if he is at home I will see him first, and try and arrange for terms of separation; you, meantime, remaining in the cab in an adjoining street. If he absolutely refuses any terms, and insists on your remaining with him, then, unless you are prepared to go back to him"—

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Margaret.

"Then you had better avail yourself of my plan; drive off without letting your husband see you, and take lodgings with the people I know, purchasing whatever you may immediately want. I will stand in the place of your uncle for the moment. No doubt he will repay me when he returns."

"I think that will be best," said Margaret.

They drove in a cab to the lodgings in Ebury Street which Mr. Bilfil had lately taken. Edward halted the cab in a street adjoining, and went by himself to the place. Mr. Bilfil was at home. Edward was shown into a shabbily furnished drawing-room, wherein sat Mr. Bilfil in a faded crimson easy-chair, smoking a very good cigar. Edward started, and turned first red and then pale. He was the fat straw-colored man he had seen on the boat with his Patty.

"Well," said Bilfil, surveying Edward critically, as he examined his card, held out at arms-length between his finger and thumb—"well, and pray what is your business?"

"I come from Paston and Brett's," said Edward; "and I have come, in fact, to speak—to mention, in fact—on behalf of your wife."

Bilfil blew a great cloud of smoke from his mouth and nostrils.

"Pray by whose authority?"

"By her authority."

"Mr. Hulse, by-the-way, are you related to the tile and chimney-pot man?"

"Mr. Fleetwood Hulse is my father."

"Ah, Mr. Edward Hulse, then allow me to remind you of the unfortunate fate that attends those who interfere in matrimonial squabbles. I shall receive no message of any kind from her, except a promise of unconditional submission. If she returns to me at once—now, this very evening—I will let by-gones be by-gones, and try to reconcile myself to my lot; otherwise my doors will be closed against her, and I shall put the matter in the hands of the detective police."

"Then you will come to no terms of separation?"

"Terms! Nonsense! Here is my home at her disposal; if she absents herself from it, let her do it at her own risk and at her own charges, as far as I am concerned."

"You are a brute, Mr. Bilfil!"

Mr. Bilfil rose in a threatening manner. "Get out of the room, you miserable lawyer's clerk! Do you hear?"

"You shall hear from me again," said Edward, retreating toward the door. "I won't demean myself by a personal altercation with you—at present."

"And you shall hear from me, young whipper-snapper?" cried Bilfil, as Edward went out.

"Hulse—Fleetwood Hulse—where have I seen his name lately? Ah, I remember; we did a bill for that gentleman. And that bill must be pretty nearly due. Ha! we must see to that. Really," said Bilfil to himself, "it will be a most fortunate occurrence if my Margaret does take herself off in this hasty way. It will save me no end of trouble and expense. The situation was becoming unendurable. To live with a wealthy prig, who will support you in becom-

ing state and style, must be irksome enough; but a penniless prig—a prig whom you have to support and supply with all the appliances of feminine extravagance—oh, Bilfil, how could you have made such a stupid blunder! Thank your lucky stars, old fellow, if you get out of it so cheaply."

CHAPTER V.

A CITY SUNDAY.

"Fresshe is thy river, with his lusty strandis;
Blithe be thy chirches, well sownyng are thy belles."

It is Sunday morning. The sun is really shining very brightly in Lower Bridge Street. Breakfast is laid, and Lucy has already finished hers, and is standing with her prayer-book in her hand, awaiting her mother, who is going to church with her, but who is not so impatient as her daughter, having lost her interest in young curates. The ting-tang of the bells calling the faithful to prayers sounds lazily through the windows, which are half opened, and which admit the fresh morning air; for even in Lower Bridge Street on a fine Sunday morning the air is fresh enough. The sparrows are twittering and hopping about in the yard outside, and picking up a grain here and there, to the indignation of the white Dorkings, who make sudden futile dashes at them when they come too near. Edward is late for breakfast this morning.

His couch has been haunted by regretful thoughts; he has misgivings that he has rather made a mess of it. With the best possible intentions, he has succeeded in making out a very suspicious case against himself. He—the former lover of Margaret Paston—had carried her off from her husband's home, had placed her in lodgings chosen by himself, had supplied her with money for her daily necessities. As a lawyer, he was bound to admit that there was a strong *prima facie* case against him. What would the governor say if he came to hear of it? what Patty? For Patty was away at Margate for a holiday; and although he had introduced Mrs. Bilfil to her father and mother as the niece of his employer—Paston—and a married lady, yet he could see that Robinson and his wife didn't like their lodger. When Patty came home there would be an explosion. The two young women would fight; there couldn't be a doubt about that. What a perplexed tangle of trouble he had got himself into, and all so innocently! He couldn't help falling in love with Patty; he couldn't help taking the part of his cousin and old flame, Margaret. He felt altogether unhinged and dispirited. He had made half a promise to go down and see Markwood at Henley, but he wouldn't do it; he hadn't the heart to go out. When his people had gone to church he would go down to breakfast, and have a long morning's sulk and smoke in the old warehouse.

When he came down, however his father was still sitting brooding over the fire.

"You didn't go to church with them, then, governor?"

Fleetwood Hulse turned on his son a pair of blood-shot, haggard eyes.

"What should I go to church for?"

"Why, to get absolution for the week's misdoings—the week's! the quarter's rather: it's three months since you went to church, governor."

"And if it was three years, why should you make remarks about it?"

"Oh, if you take it in that way, governor, I assure you I didn't mean anything. Rather crusty this morning," said Edward, *sotto voce*, helping himself to some dry toast. "Hollo! what's this?" he cried, seeing a letter addressed to him on the mantel-piece. "Letter from somebody—must have come by late delivery last night—wonder who it is?" He takes it up, turns it over and over, breaks the seal, and reads; his face expands. "Ha, ha! that's a good joke. Here's a letter, father—a letter from a fellow in Birchin Lane, reminding me that my acceptance—eh, see the joke—my acceptance for how much do you think, gover-

nor?—why, for three hundred pounds!—has been dishonored. I should think it had, eh? Ha, ha! Now I wonder who is the real Simon Pure, the real Ned Hulse, who ought to have this agreeable little reminder? Can't you imagine him, father, the real Edward Hulse, sitting at his breakfast, chipping his egg as I do, expecting such an agreeable little note as this? He's some scapegrace, depend upon it; some fellow who's been idle and dissolute, living upon money that didn't belong to him—eh, father, can't you fancy him? And perhaps he's been driven to this by having to make up some money for his employers he'd robbed them of, eh? And there he's wondering what will come next, shaking at every step that passes, quivering at every knock he hears upon the door. Oh, father, oughtn't we to be thankful that we haven't got that man's load upon our shoulders, that we can spend our time in rest and quietness, eh, father?"

Fleetwood turned round and glared at his son: there is no other word for it.

"What is it?" he said, sinking back into his old attitude. "I didn't hear what you were saying."

"I was talking about a fellow who's had a bill come back for three hundred pounds, and I was wondering what sort of a chap he was, and thinking what a funk he must be in, trembling at every step, at every knock"—

Rap-a-tap-a-tap-tap, bang, bang! went the knocker.

Old Hulse jumped to his feet as though he had been shot.

"Ned, don't let them come! Save me, Ned, save me!"

"What's the matter now? why, you're regularly upset, father!"

Here the curate entered breathless.

"Where's Lucy?" he cried.

"Lucy's gone five minutes since, and the little bell is ringing as hard as it can. Look sharp, John. Don't you wish you could have a pipe, instead?"

Still Fleetwood Hulse cowered in his chair, furtively eyeing the two young men from under his shaggy white eyebrows.

"Just tell me what this means," cried John, throwing a letter on to the table. It's some joke, I suppose; but I must say a very bad one. I'll bring Lucy home, and see you again about it. The fellow ought to be prosecuted. Shall I leave the letter with you? No, I'll put it in my pocket."

John ran out again, and Edward looked at his father with distended eyes.

"Why, that was the very ditto to the letter I've just had. Father, what can it mean?"

Old Hulse sat in his chair choking, vainly snatching at his neckcloth. Edward ran to him, tore away his collar and handkerchief, threw some cold water over his face. He revived.

"Ned, it's all true!" he gasped. "I did it!"

"Did what? what do you mean?"

"Put your name to it, and John's. Oh! oh!"

Edward struck his fists against his head, and rushed out into the yard. His poor old father had gone mad. He'd no other thought than that. His father was mad. He went out on the wharf by the river side; the tide was running sullenly down, gradually unavailing the slimy mud flats. He couldn't get a breath of air there. Where should he go? Then he chanced to glance up at the windows of the house, and saw his father's white, haggard face looking out from his bedroom: he pulled the blind down with a bang. Edward rushed into the house, and up the stairs. "Father!" he shouted, "father!" He tried the door; it was locked. He flung himself against it heavily; the bolt gave way, and he found himself in his father's room. The old man stood by the window, holding his razor-case in his trembling hands.

"What's the meaning of this, Edward? Come, Sir, this is an outrage!"

"Come down, father; come down stairs. I want to talk to you. Here, you can't manage to strop those razors; give 'em to me; you know how nicely I can set them for you."

"So you can, Ned, so you can; you ought to have been a barber; you're thrown away in a gentlemanly profession. You never think what money you cost, Ned—money, ay, money, lots of money—to make you a gentleman; and you'd better have been a barber."

It was a very old grievance between Fleetwood and his son that the latter did not assume that bearing and attitude which was his ideal of the gentleman; that he was too humble-minded, too fond of mixing with humble people; that he forgot who the Hulses were, and brought about him a set of people whom it was degrading to associate with, begad. And now in his trouble the old man fell back on the familiar accusation.

All this while Edward's only trouble was about his father's state of mind; he thought that he was mad. He put the razors in his pocket, took the old man by the arm, and led him down to the sitting-room, all the time trying to soothe and humor him.

"And so you're been getting bills discounted, eh, father? and spent the money, eh? Ha, ha! that's good."

Fleetwood eyed his son sternly and savagely. "You fool," he said, "grinning there like a hyena: it's nothing to you, then, that your father is a disgraced and ruined man? And to think of the family, too! O Lord, it's too much!" He put his head upon his arms and groaned.

Then for the first time a knowledge of the truth flashed upon Edward. His father was not mad; he was only a criminal—only a forger. He got up and went toward the door. Then he caught the old man's eyes following him wistfully. He turned back and knelt down before him, and put his arms round his neck and kissed his grizzled face.

"Father, how could you do it? how could you?"

The old man's frame shook and quivered, and for a long time he tried in vain to speak.

"I was driven to it, Ned, driven to it. I owed them money—the Company. It would have been discovered. I should have lost my place. I should have taken it up on Monday. It was only due yesterday. I thought I should be in time."

"How would you have taken it up, father?"

If, indeed, the money were actually forthcoming, it might be possible the matter would go no farther.

"I should have borrowed it, Ned."

"From the Company?"

Fleetwood nodded.

"Have you taken—do you owe them any more?"

"A couple of hundred pounds, perhaps."

"And private debts?"

"No, not a penny. I never would run in debt, you know, Ned. I've always paid on the nail all my life. It was that ruined me, Ned; that principle I had. And I couldn't see your mother going without her little comforts, and you have cost me such a lot, Ned. I hoped to have made a gentleman of you, but I am lost altogether now. I shall end my days in a hulk. Well, it doesn't much matter."

Edward knelt by the table, his forehead pressed between his two hands, his reason quite overthrown.

"John will be coming in directly," he said at last. "What shall we say to him?"

"We will tell him it is a mistake; that this letter is intended for John Jones, a customer of the Company's."

Edward shook his head. "No use: it's sure to come out. Are there—are there any other names to this bill?"

"Only the Company's indorsement, and that I have a right to sign."

"Then you only wrote my name and John's?"

"Only those."

Come, after all, the matter was not hopeless. If only John could be induced to be silent as to the forgery, then he, Edward, might be able to raise the money in a few days. He would have to pay heavily for it, but that he couldn't help. He would insist on his father's retiring. The

Company would give him a pension, and with the balance of his salary left after paying off the installments of the enormous incubus of debt his father's rescue would involve, they would be enabled to live together in some cheap house in some cheap neighborhood. There would be no marriage for him, no Patty—to that he must make up his mind at once; but absolute degradation and misery would be saved. If only John would consent.

But would John be thus tractable? and would he hold to his word with Lucy, or would he break that sweet sister's heart? They couldn't expect him to hold to his troth, but it would be very hard if he didn't. Then another thought flashed into his brain. There was Lucy's little portion—five hundred pounds—was that safe?

"Father, where's Lucy's money?"

Fleetwood shook his head, waved his hands, and groaned.

"What, is that gone too? Father, how could you?"

The thing seemed hopeless now; and yet, after all, he had only robbed his own children. Surely they could contrive that no punishment should fall upon him.

Edward thought for a few moments. "Is there anything else, father," he said at last—"anything else you have taken?"

"No, nothing."

"Then, after all, we may save you. If only John were tractable. Everything depends upon him—everything."

CHAPTER VI.

"Thou art said to have a stubborn soul,
That apprehends no further than this world
And squar'st thy life accordingly."

It would not be fair to Bilfil to accept his wife's view of his character without making some allowance for her prejudices. He was a man to whom life appeared as a series of experiments. These it behooved him to make with care and skill, but he held it unwise to risk very much on the success of any one of them. He was profoundly penetrated by the conviction that if he did not himself turn to the best account the particular modicum of life that was his, no other force or power would interfere in his behalf, and he had thus set himself to realize the utmost amount of enjoyment he had capacity for. The passions and desires of life he regarded as a good huntsman might his hounds, to be restrained, indeed, and disciplined for the better fulfillment of their work, but as affording by their efficiency and success the chief reward of their master, the very reason of his existence.

His marriage he regarded as an experiment that had failed. He had intended that it should establish him more firmly in ease and prosperity. The event had tended entirely the other way. Had Margaret, indeed, been content to fall into the course of life that suited him, to have become an elastic and useful companion and assistant, he might have proved himself not wanting in the essentials of good comradeship. But he had no mind to abandon his whole course of life, to give up his companions and his pleasures. No; the life of a decorous Paterfamilias was unendurable to him. He hadn't sufficient patience either, or power of dissimulation, to conceal his feelings of disappointment and disgust at the result of his schemes; and Margaret, who would have done much from devotion, but was too impulsive to take a calm and prudent view of her position, had been driven to madness by the discovery of the real state of her husband's affections.

Bilfil's chief object now was to avoid scandal. He was quite content that his wife should leave him. Why continue an experiment which had shown itself to be fruitless? But he wished above all things to avoid public gossip. Had Margaret gone to her Uncle Thomas's house in Russell Square, he would have been content that she should stay there, and he would have agreed to make some allowance for her support. But that she should try to live independently, perhaps dragging his own name

into the scandal which would be pretty sure to follow her—and above all, that this young Hulse, this half-cousin and old admirer of Margaret's, should come between them—these things enraged him beyond measure.

Happily, by extraordinary accident, a weapon lay ready to his hand by whose means he could dispose effectually of this impertinent young fellow.

Bilfil had many resources and means of making money. Besides his share in the *Daily Mentor*, which, however, was not a lucrative investment, and in which he actually was merely the nominee of the great financial firm which had taken him up, he had a considerable interest in the discount establishment in Birch Lane. The capital, however, of this establishment was not contributed by Bilfil. The great money firm of Grindrod and Gordon had set him up in this business also. If you were a city man, and the promoter of a great company which was to make the fortunes of its subscribers, and incidentally to set afloat your own, you would know that it was useless to attempt to get the great firm to finance your undertaking unless you first secured the assistance of Bilfil. Then your course was easy enough. With Bilfil's arm through yours, you would pass through the crowded counting-house, full of clerks and big books and nervous waiting clients, and into the inner sanctuary of the great firm, where, surrounded by ground-glass partitions, seated at school-house-looking desks, the great chieftains of the monetary world were maturing their important transactions. Bilfil would whisper into Mr. Grindrod's ear, the great man would survey you critically with scrutinizing eyes. A memorandum would be hastily scrawled; Bilfil would lead you forth again a made man. The great New Nebraska Dock and Warehouse Company, Limited, was now a living force; its shares were at a premium; its promotion-money was safe. Above all, Bilfil was the richer by a tithe of the money the great firm had advanced—an advance which would gather bulk in discount, commission, and interest, till it assumed quite a portentous figure among the assets of Grindrod and Gordon. Such were, then, the golden rewards of the chase in the happy hunting-grounds of the great city.

But Bilfil knew very well that this could not last forever. He knew more of what was going on in the world of commerce than the men for whom he worked. For some time he had felt misgivings that the golden period, during which money had fallen into the very mouths of the bold and unscrupulous, was quietly coming to an end. He had therefore gladly accepted a commission from his great patrons to proceed to America to investigate the affairs of a railway company to which they had made large advances. He had also arranged with the proprietor and editor of the *Daily Mentor* to furnish them with a weekly letter on the social aspects and commercial prospects of the Western States. Now this employment suited him remarkably well. When the inevitable crash came on he would be away; he would be gathering together a connection which might enable him to build up an enduring edifice for himself out of the ruins of his friends' houses. It gave him an opportunity, too, to realize; to transfer his liabilities to the great firm; to pocket his share of the profits already made.

"Don't trouble yourself about your little discounting business," said Mr. Gordon to him; "hand that over to us; we will take all current bills at their market value, and give you a quit-tance. Our purposes have been answered; you have opened out to us opportunities we should have been unable to avail ourselves of but for you. As for the good-will of the business, leave that in our hands; you will have no reason to repent your confidence." And indeed, when Bilfil received a check for five thousand pounds from the magnificent firm, he felt that in trusting to their good intentions he had truly acted with wisdom. His trust, however, did not go so far as to permit him to leave the money in their hands. The check was duly cashed, and the proceeds were paid over into Bilfil's own

banking account. Then he began to breathe freely, and to think more seriously of his voyage, and of winding up his affairs.

Of all the bills, good, bad, and indifferent, which had matured, ripened, or rotted in his office cases be retained only one; all the rest he had handed over to Grindrod and Gordon. This one bill was that accepted by John Jones and Edward Hulse, and indorsed by the Drain-pipe Company. He had long ago spotted that bill; suspected that there was something fishy about it; and yet he had come to look upon it with affection. For with that bill, if it were not duly met—and Bilfil suspected that it would not be met—he had a weapon in his hands available against the abettors of his wife, and against the only man whose influence with her he feared, her old boy-lover, Edward Hulse. Now the bill was due this very Saturday: had it been met? Bilfil took a cab and went down into the City to see.

The bill, of course, had been passed to his bankers, and they had presented it at the bank where it was payable. Banking hours were just over as Bilfil reached the door of the United Bank. He was sufficiently acquainted with the manager, however, to obtain admittance at the private door. The clerks were still at work under the green-shaded gas-lamps making up their balances.

"That bill, said Pugh; "um—ah—yes; no, indeed, it hasn't been met; we had a slip from Prodgers's to say it was coming back. The notary will bring it up to-night, about eight o'clock, I dare say. You shall have it on Monday morning."

"I'd rather have it to night," said Bilfil, "and I'll set my lawyer to work at it."

"Oh, if you like," said Pugh; "if you think it's worth while. It's sure to be taken up on Monday, too. It's a very good bill of the sort."

"I'll have it to night," said Bilfil. "I'll give 'em notice of dishonor to-night."

When Bilfil had arranged with his lawyer to proceed upon the bill instanter, he went down to Margate to spend the ensuing day there. Patty was there, he knew, and he meant to employ his Sunday profitably. He was very much in love with Patty; and now that his wife was out of the way, arrangements might be practicable which before seemed difficult. Ah, if he could only secure Patty as a companion in his American trip, what a tolerable thing life would be!

CHAPTER VII.

"I did not take my leave of him, but had
Most pretty things to say."

Up to eight o'clock on Sunday evening nothing more was seen or heard of the Reverend John Jones. He hadn't been able to go home with Lucy, having been called away to see his father, who had come to town the night before. But he was coming in the evening, after church.

The day dragged on wearily enough. Old Hulse sat motionless by the fire, his handkerchief over his head; he would not stir either to eat or drink; he didn't want anything; let them take their meals without him. Lucy and her mother, though distressed, were not surprised. He had such fits periodically, fits of sullenness and gloom. To his son, however, who knew the cause, his father's continuous depression was a melancholy sign. It involved keeping a constant watch upon him; for that his father was on the lookout for an opportunity to put an end to his existence, Edward didn't doubt. Here, however, he could call his mother and his sister to help him. He told them this much: that he believed his father's head had been turned by pecuniary embarrassments; that he might at any moment attempt something desperate. He entreated them to watch him narrowly, to follow all his movements, to take everything out of his way. At the same time he made his mother pack a small portmanteau full of absolute necessities. This he took himself by a cab, in the first instance, to Charing Cross, and after that he carried the portmanteau in his hand, watching carefully to see if he were followed, over Hungerford Bridge to the Southwestern Terminus, and left it in

the cloak-room. If the worst came to the worst, and John refused to keep silence, he would take his father off to Southampton before a search could be made for him, and then he would go with him by the next steamer to America. There he could manage to support his father, no doubt. His mother and sister must follow. He had about ten pounds in his possession; that sum would suffice for the railway fare to Southampton and steerage passage to America; for provisions and comforts for the voyage they must trust to Providence. But, after all, there would, he trusted, be no need for such a step. John, if held harmless, would never needlessly bring disgrace upon the father of his sweetheart. And if John were stanch, who could hurt his father? The money he had appropriated belonging to the Company must be restored; but they could hardly prosecute the old man criminally for taking it. He was rather an agent than a servant of the Company; was paid by commission, and was authorized to sign on behalf of the Company. Edward didn't know much about criminal law, but he didn't think they could prosecute for embezzlement. At all events, the directors were kindly old-world people, who had known his father in his better days, and who would hardly deal harshly if the money were refunded. All depended upon John; and Edward nervously speculated and debated to and fro in various aspects, according to his various moods, as to what kind of action would be taken by John Jones.

Turning these things over in his mind as he walked homeward from his twilight expedition, the whole outside world seemed like a dream or vision to him. All his soul was inclosed within that narrow space bounded on one side by the river, on the other by the quiet street—that little oasis of life among all the Sabbath stillness of the City—that home which had been once to him such a haven of refuge, but which now seemed as a creek of sad desolation.

As he plunged into one of the narrow dark-some lanes which led down to Lower Bridge Street, and caught the familiar whiff of river smells, his heart sank within him. He couldn't go through with this thing; he hadn't the nerve, the power. Surely it could be put off, delayed; he must have this night for thought, for the marshaling of facts, for the arrangement of his plans. Surely he must have this much respite! Then, as he came into the quiet, deserted street, he saw him before him, looming in the rising mists of the river, a stalwart, broad-shouldered man. He swung along with easy gait, humming to himself snatches of melodies, which might be airs of psalms, perhaps, but which had a suspicious go and gayety about them nevertheless. There was not a soul in the street but he, and as he reached the door, the little postern let into the great gates of the wharf, he turned round on his heel and stopped short. He was John Jones, the lover of Lucy. He didn't see Edward, however; he was immersed in thought. Seemingly doubtful whether he would enter or not, he put his hand to the door and took it away again, half opened and then closed the door, but finally making up his mind, he passed through; then the door closed behind him. At this Edward took up his resolve all in a moment, by instinct as it were: he would terminate this killing suspense, he would know the best or the worst.

Perhaps it was the sight of Edward's face, which looked white and ghastly by the light of the one dim lamp which twinkled over the house door, perhaps it was some forecast of the future that moved him, but as Edward touched Jones on the arm—he stood waiting on the doorstep, having just rung the bell—he started violently and shuddered.

"Hallo!" he said, turning round on Edward.

"What's up?"

"Come with me into the warehouse for a minute, I've something important to tell you. Oh, don't be afraid of Scipio; he is shut up. Poor old dog, he gets so restless on Sundays when he hears the bells going. I used always to take him out—up the river—on Sundays, before he went blind, and now, poor dog, the same fit comes on him sometimes, and he'll

stagger away to the Old Swan Pier when he hears the bells chiming over the river; and he barks and howls too, when he can't get out; so I shut him up in the up stairs rooms."

Thus Edward ran on, nervously talking while he struck a light and lit a candle in his little workshop. At first the candle would only give out a small blue flame, the wick having been burned off close; by-and-by it flamed up. Each looked into the other's face and read therein a purpose strange and sinister.

Lucy Hulse had heard the ring of the bell, had known by the pull of it that her lover was there. She would have run down stairs to let him in, but she was reading to her mother one of the psalms for the evening, and she only paused for a moment, and looked wistfully at her mother, who was absorbed in some kind of mental abstraction. She wondered how long that sluggish girl down stairs would be before she went to the door. Hours seemed to have passed between the sound of that quick, energetic ring and the slow tramp of the servant on the staircase. The door was opened, but was shut again at once. Lucy listened intently, repeating mechanically the concluding verses of the psalm. Then, as her mother reverently bowed her head at the conclusion, Lucy ran out of the room on the landing, but no one was coming up the stairs—and yet she had a feeling as though her lover was close at hand.

"Jane!" she cried down the well of the stairs—"Jane, there was a ring."

"So I thought, miss, but there was nobody there."

Lucy returned into the room disappointed; yet surely he would be here presently. Then she went down stairs, opened the door, and looked out into the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

"For look you, sir, you know not which way you shall go."

"I'm glad I've seen you before I went in," said John, beginning hurriedly to speak before Edward could arrange his ideas, and while he was yet hesitating to encounter the cruel task before him. "I'm glad I've seen you; because it's probable I may save a very painful scene—a scene that would be very painful to me, I assure you; yes, indeed, very painful. I assure you I will feel it very much." Here John's face assumed an expression of extreme sensibility and self-compassion.

"What do you mean?" cried Edward, hoarsely.

"Well, my dear sir, I've been thinking very painfully over the matter—prayerfully too, I might say," said John, throwing a rapid glance at Edward to see how he took it; "and I have, very reluctantly indeed—in fact, with great violence to my own feelings (being, as you know, a man of very tender feelings)—but I have come to the conclusion, reluctantly, as you may know—"

"Well," said Edward, looking in a dazed way at his face. "Well?"

"That it won't do. My engagement with your sister must be broken off. I don't know how I shall bear it, indeed, for I was very deeply attached to her—very. A most excellent young woman, and calculated to make anyone happy and comfortable in the highest degree. I can't tell you how I feel the disappointment; but there are considerations higher than those of mere earthly affection: there's the duty I owe my parents and—and my godfather. All my prospects in life depend upon them, all my chance of the living of Pumptrisant, besides the legacy I'm sure to have. Now, Edward, as a dutiful son, I ask you, how can I go against that?"

"You told us your father approved," said Edward, in a faint voice. He realized the situation now. Heavens! was this the man at whose feet they must crawl, whose mercy and forbearance they were bound to implore?

"So he had, in a way. I hadn't given him all the particulars, and perhaps I wasn't explicit enough as to your position, and so on. But

when my father and my godfather—Sir Pantlin Jones, you know, baronet and member of Parliament—when they came to see the house you lived in, and all that; and really it hadn't struck me, but when I come to look at it I see that it would be a descent now, wouldn't it, from Sir Pantlin Jones of Pumptrisant to Hulse of Ebbsfleet Wharf? Well, I told them your father was a wharfinger, but it seems that the drain-pipes upset my godfather. I begged of them to see Lucy, who is such a sweet girl that they couldn't help being pleased with her. But it was no use. He's so impatient, is Sir Pantlin. 'John,' he said to me, 'by —, if you marry a bricklayer's daughter, I'll disown you forever.'"

"Oh, he said that, did he?" cried Edward, white with suppressed passion, his sense of helplessness and powerlessness making his rage glow all the more fiercely. "And what did you say?"

"What could I say, my dear fellow? I did try to explain that they were pipes and tiles, and not bricks, that your father dealt in, and that very respectable people sold such things in London; but it was not a morsel of good."

"Then you mean to say—"

"I want you to take this letter to your sister. Break it to her as gently as you can, my dear fellow, for I dare say she'll feel it as much as I do. Only give her to understand that this is final, and ask her to pity me."

"Pity you, you infernal scoundrel!"

"What!" shouted John.

"You lying, cozening scoundrel!"

The word roused all the fiery blood of the Welshman. With the back of his hand he smote Edward in the mouth, and in a moment his lips were streaked with blood. With the rapidity of lightning Edward returned the buffet with a left-handed blow, delivered so straight and true that, as Jones threw back his head to avoid it, it fell upon him just under the right ear, so that he dropped heavily to the ground.

The candle had fallen over in the scuffle. All was silent after the first crash of the fall of the man, and all was dark.

"John!" cried Edward, in alarm. "John, have I hurt you? where are you? what are you doing? Speak to me; for Heaven's sake, speak!"

There wasn't a word in reply. Not a sound to be heard, except the howling and scratching of the big dog up stairs.

"John! John!" said Edward, stooping over him, and taking hold of his arm, "what have I done to you?"

The arm dropped down limp and flaccid. There was no flutter of breath or whisper of life in the body lying there. With trembling haste Edward felt for the match-box, and tried to strike a light. The match flared, sputtered, went out. His hands were wet with some viscid fluid; he couldn't wipe it off. He got a light at last. The feeble flame of the candle disclosed the body of Jones lying prone and lifeless; its head rested in a small pool of blood. The head had struck against the triangular edge of the iron vise. It was impossible that the life should have gone out of a strong man's body on such small provocation. It was a swoon he was in; he would recover presently. But it was awful, too, to see the stillness of the body. There was a tremulous flutter of the nether lip for a moment—was it the sign of returning life? No, rather the last struggle of expiring nature. For after that the features took a terribly set and rigid look, the expression that only the master Death can limn.

Edward held his face between his hands. What was this gulf that had opened beneath his feet, that had cut him off in a moment from all the hopes and desires of life? Had this curse, then, indeed, descended upon him, this fatal, irrevocable curse? No, it was an evil dream, a vision. But there was blood upon his hands—blood!

"Edward," cried a sweet, soft voice, the voice of his sister calling to him from afar, "are you there? Where is John?"

"I don't know."

Between all his past life, bright and honor-

able, and the dark, dismal future awaiting him, there was now this invisible barrier, these words, the words of the unhappy prototype of all blood-stained men—"I know not."

CHAPTER IX.

"Pless my soul! how full of cholers I am, and trembling of mind!"

THE Reverend John Jones had occupied lodgings, during the time he had been in charge of the parish of St. Saveall's, in Finsbury Circus, a locality, be it said, much more airy and cheerful than Pimlico. It need hardly be remarked that the mistress of the house was a Welshwoman. Her husband was a little atomy of a man, who was agent to some slate company in North Wales. She herself was a buxom woman, clever, tidy, and very clean. She was really glad to have as a lodger the son of the archdeacon. She was not a churchwoman herself; she attended a Welsh chapel, whence was served a distillation of all the strong faiths in which her countrymen delight; nevertheless she respected much the dignitaries of the Establishment. Little Evan Morris, her husband, was a shocking radical—would have people vote against their landlords, and generally fly in the face of their bread-and-butter; but Gwen was a careful, prudent woman, who looked forward to returning to Pumptrisant some day, and despised such vagaries.

The archdeacon was a tall, bony man, who always wore an ample black frock, which seemed glossy enough in Wales, but, somehow or other, looked rather dusty in London—a broad-brimmed hat, about which was a perpetual black band, also harboring the dust. He had a brown, weather-beaten face, dark, vague eyes; a pleasant smile was generally hovering about his mouth. Sir Pantlin Jones showed a seamed but fresh-looking apple face, wore always a gray suit and a blue bird's-eye neck tie, limped a little in his gait, and swore sonorously.

"De-ear, it's the archdeacon and Sir Pantlin!" cried Mrs. Morris, as she opened the door. "Well, indeed, and who would have thought of seeing you? Come in, do!"

"We've come to breakfast with my son," cried the archdeacon, after he had shaken hands with Mrs. Morris. "We're not putting you out in any way, I hope?"

"Name o'goodness, no; but"—Here Mrs. Morris' face clouded over, and she fell into a state of great perplexity. "Come in, do, and sit down!" she cried at last, her face clearing for a moment as she led the way into the sitting-room. She carefully dusted the seats of two chairs with her apron, and left her guests to their own devices, while she proceeded to take counsel of her thoughts.

John Jones, her lodger, had not come home the night before. She didn't think much of that; he might have stopped out with some friends. Mrs. Morris knew the ways of young men too well to feel decided alarm. But his father—would he not be angry? And Mrs. Morris's first impulses, despite her careful ways, were always on the side opposed to law and authority. No, she thought, she had better send a note by special messenger to Ebbsfleet Wharf, saying that the Reverend John Jones's father had come to breakfast, and asking if he had been staying there for the night, or if Mr. Hulse knew where he was. It would not take ten minutes to run to Lower Bridge Street and back. In the meantime her lodger's friends must wait patiently.

This they did at first, looking at the engravings on the wall: a lithograph of Aberdovey Pier; a distempered view of the Bay of Naples, with the schooner *Mary Ann*, port of Aberystwith, Thomas Jones, master, 110 tons register, floating thereon in great pride; a small portrait of Parch. Evan Evans, a shining light of the Calvinistic faith; and a large one of Sir Watkyns, his lady, his horse, and a few favorite hounds, which occupied a conspicuous post of honor over the fire-place. Sir Pantlin soon became impatient and rang the bell. Nobody answered it, and then he began to swear. The archdeacon pulled him up sharp.

"Do you remember in whose presence you are? Come, come, Sir Pantlin," he cried, "it may be all very well at Pumptrisant, but it won't do in London."

"That reminds me," said Sir Pantlin, "of a story my grandfather used to tell—God bless me, what's the matter?"

For here the door opened, and a young girl ran in, fair to see, but very white and eager-looking. She came up to his father (to John's father), and took him by the hand.

"You are John's father, I know. Oh, tell me where he is! Where did you leave him?"

"Why, he's here, of course; these are his rooms. Bless me what!"

"Indeed he's not here, archdeacon; he didn't come home last night, and I sent to Mr. Hulse's to see if they knew where he was. This is Miss Hulse, *cariad anwyl!*" cried Mrs. Morris, appearing hot and flustered, her bonnet stuck upright on her head.

"How very unaccountable!" cried the archdeacon. "He left us in Piccadilly at eight o'clock last night, saying that he was going home, and asked us to breakfast with him at nine. What can be the matter? You say, young lady, that you have seen or heard nothing of him?"

"Only the bell!" cried Lucy; "only the bell! I heard his ring at the door, but there was nobody there, and from that moment I feared that something had happened." Lucy began to sob.

"I can't understand it," said the archdeacon, turning quite pale and flaccid. "What shall we do?"

"Stay, here is an open letter," cried Sir Pantlin, "lying on the table. Read it, Jones; it may throw light upon the affair."

The archdeacon took it up and read it. It was the letter advising Jones of the dishonor of the bill to which his name had been forged.

The father groaned heavily; for the moment he thought that all was explained—that his son, overwhelmed with embarrassments of which his father was ignorant, had either absconded or committed suicide; but, looking again at the letter, he saw that there was written across it in his son's untidy scrawl, "This is either a stupid hoax or a base forgery."

"I think," said the archdeacon, looking round wildly—"I think we'd better send for the police. Don't go, young lady; we shall require your assistance."

"Yes," cried Sir Pantlin. Run, Mrs. Morris, give my compliments—Sir Pantlin's compliments—Sir Pantlin of Pumptrisant, his compliments—to the nearest magistrate, and request that he will do me the favor to place the services of his most experienced detectives and active officers at my—at Sir Pantlin's—disposal. Do you hear, Mrs. Morris?"

"Oh, yes!" cried Lucy; "he has come to some harm. Oh, do run for the police! I will go too; I will go and look for him."

They couldn't stop her. She ran out quickly.

CHAPTER X.

"Pity, you ancient stones, those tender babes."

AT nine o'clock on Monday morning, Edward Hulse issued from the postern-gate of Ebbsfleet Wharf. He looked pale and haggard, and cast an uneasy glance up and down the street as he went out. He turned eastward, and passed up a succession of narrow streets, in which the combined flavor of oranges, red-herrings, fresh and kippered fish, mingled with tarry ropy odors from the river hard by, and pushed his way through swarms of costermongers, crowds of porters and loafers, threading in and out among drays and lorries, whose heavy horses made the pavements ring with the resonance of their iron hoofs. Passing through all this noise and confusion, he came to a quiet triangular space, round which were ranged, in a hollow crescent, numberless carts and vans, waiting for their morning load.

Before him crouched the grim gray walls of the Tower, about whose battlements and bastions the light gray mists of the morning still lingered. The flag of England dropped half-

way down on the staff, betokening the death of one of her most veteran and gallant soldiers, while visible here and there, between the crenellations of the walls, the scarlet-glowing coat, the black bear-skin, the glinting bayonet of the sentry, caught the cheery morning beams of the sun, as he struggled forth from his encompassing vapors.

Around the dry and arid fosse of the Tower is a little belt of shrubbery and grass. To this the entrance is by a wooden wicket, which the inhabitants of the neighboring square are allowed to use. Edward passed unchallenged into this inclosure. The meagre shrubs, whose leaves, even now, were dropping rattling to the ground at each breath of wind, afforded only a scanty screen. Nevertheless, this had been before now the trysting-place of Edward and Patty, and here he had been summoned to meet her at nine o'clock this Monday morning.

"I thought you were in Margate, Patty, till I got your note just now."

Edward spoke in dreary, mechanical tones: his soul was away. He might move hither and thither, his mind rested always in the narrow inclosure of Ebbsfleet Wharf. Patty, in a moment, noticed his gloom.

"You are not well, Edward?" she said.

"What is the matter?"

"Oh, I'm pretty well," he replied, with a forced laugh—"that is, I'm a little seedy, that's all."

"The reason I asked you to meet me," said Patty, with dignity—her pride had taken alarm at Edward's coldness—"the reason I asked you to meet me here was to put you on your guard."

"Against what?" said Edward, with a start.

"Against Bilfil. He is your enemy, and I am afraid he has some hold over you."

Edward ground his teeth.

"And pray how do you know anything about Bilfil?" he cried, angrily.

Patty smiled; she didn't mind his anger.

"I met him at Margate, and I had a long walk with him yesterday morning. Indeed, he made me an offer, Ned, and I refused it."

"He, Bilfil, offered you marriage!" cried Edward.

Patty nodded, and went on:

"I refused him, and then he asked about you; and then, of course, I told him all about it, and he said that you were a fool, and couldn't take care of yourself, much less of anybody else—those were his very words, Ned; and—you mustn't be angry—that you would be in prison before long. And then I got warm, and called him a liar; and he laughed, and took out his pocket-book, and showed me a paper, a bill, with your name to it; and I couldn't believe my eyes, and then he shut up his book with a snap. 'Like that,' he cried, 'I will shut up your Master Edward!' Oh, Edward, the very click of that lock made me shudder. And I didn't lose a moment, but came back to London by the next train, and I went almost to your house, and I was going to knock at the door, and ask for you—I didn't like to, Ned; oh, I felt so wretched, Ned!—but at that moment I heard somebody coming along. It was quite dusk, so I stepped into the next lane, thinking, if it was you, I could see you without any fuss; and it wasn't you after all, but the curate of St. Saveall's; and then I waited, and saw him go in, and you come after him quickly, running, trying to overtake him, and I hadn't time to stop you."

Edward gave a groan. Oh, if she had only stopped him!

"I hadn't time to stop you, and finding you had a visitor, a friend, I didn't like to ask for you, Ned, and I waited some little time hoping he or you might come out; but he never came out, Ned."

Edward gave another involuntary groan.

"And then somebody spoke to me, some tipsy man, and I ran home as fast as I could, and sent you a note instead this morning. And now you really must be careful, Ned, and keep

out of the way, for I think it would break my heart to see you in prison."

"Patty," said Ned, a sudden thought striking him, "are you as true as steel, as brave as a lion? Are you to be trusted with a life?"

"Try me!" cried Patty, with a curl of the lip and a flash of the eye.

They whispered together long; and when they had finished, Patty's face was as pale as Edward's. Then they clasped hands for a moment, and went their ways.

Edward sent a note to Paston and Brett that morning, saying that he wasn't well, and would take his holiday a week sooner than he had intended; and having dispatched that by the office-boy, he went into the yard, lit a pipe, and awaited events. His sister was out; had gone out without leaving any message. This disquieted him. Where could she be? A man had called and inquired for him. Who could he be? A detective, perhaps—hardly. Swift as retribution might be, there would surely be a little respite, an hour or two of liberty, a little gleam of this bright autumn sunshine, ere the chillness and blackness of night succeeds.

There was a ring at the bell—a short, quick ring. Edward went to the gate. A respectable-looking man stood there.

"Mr. Edward Hulse in?" he said.

"I am Edward Hulse."

"Oh, then can I have a word with you?"

"Certainly. Come in."

He ushered the man into the yard.

"I have a paper here for you," the man whispered—"a writ. Suit of Bilfil. You know, I dare say."

"Yes, it's all right," said Edward; "there's nothing more to say, is there?"

"Oh, no; all right. Good-day."

"Good-day."

"Victoria, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, Defender of the Faith, to Edward Hulse of Ebbsfleet Wharf, in the County of the City of London, We warn you that, unless within twelve days after the service of this writ on you (inclusive of the day of such service), you obtain leave from one of the Judges of the Courts at Westminster to appear, and do within that time appear in our Court of Common Pleas, in an action at the suit of William Bilfil, the said William Bilfil may proceed therein to judgment and execution. Witness, Sir William Bellows, Knight, at Westminster, the sixth day of October, in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Sixty-four."

He was sharp upon him, then, this Bilfil. No respite here. Ned had been a careful, prudent youth, nervously anxious for respectability and good opinion. At any other time this writ upon him would have caused him the keenest suffering; now he scarcely felt the slightest concern. Twelve days! twelve days! What will be the end of it? Where would they all be at the end of twelve days?"

CHAPTER XI.

"Is there no pity sitting in the clouds
That sees into the bottom of my grief?"

It was not long before the services of an experienced City detective were secured by the archdeacon. The name of Sir Pantlin Jones, Bart., M. P., did, it appeared, carry some little weight with it. The detective, a stout, heavy-looking man, of an unmistakably policeman's eye and jaw, who was known to his friends as Mr. Brass, asked a good many questions concerning the circumstances of John Jones' disappearance. But he didn't seem at all excited about the matter.

"Depend upon it, gents," he said, "he'll come back. As for the young lady being in it, bless her 'art, sweethearts are none so plenty that gals should go and knock 'em on the head."

"But you don't know—you haven't explained to the officer," said Sir Pantlin to the archdeacon, "what he had gone there to do."

"No," said the archdeacon, reluctantly; "I didn't want to say anything about it. But the fact was, John, my son, was going to the house to break off the match at my command."

"And do you think," said Mr. Brass, reflectively, "that the young woman'd a said any

thing about the ring at the bell if she'd known where he'd been put to? Wasn't that nat'ral now? Fancying every ring at the bell was his—waiting to hear his footstep, bless her 'art, and he never come. No, depend upon it, gents, he's all right. His heart failed him jest at the last; he know'd he was going to break her 'art, poor dear, and he hadn't res'lotion to do it. He'll come back in a day or two; still, we'll keep our eyes open—yes, we'll keep our eyes open, gents."

"But you must do more than that, officer; remember he's my godson—Sir Pantlin Jones of Pumptrisant; you seem to forget that—my godson, do you hear?"

"Then you ought to have kep him more up in his chatecum, Sir Pantlin, than what he were by all accounts. Now, the fac' is, gents, I know a leetle more about this bisness than you thinks, for I met a young party jest now whose face I recelected, and I found he'd jest come away from this here door, and by means of a little cross-questioning I finds out that this chap has a writ to serve on our young master. Well, I puts this and that together, and I comes to the conclusion that he's laid up somewhere; not very far, p'r'ps, if we only knew."

"Eh? Begad, archdeacon, I didn't think that of our boy; don't seem like him, eh? It must be a mistake. Like this, eh?" said Sir Pantlin, picking up the open lawyer's letter.

"I'd better show the officer this letter, eh?"

The detective read the letter.

"It makes the thing only the stronger, gents. A writ to be served—a bill dishonored—that's a bit of flash in the pan about the forgery, depend upon it; his sweetheart, too, p'r'aps, poor lass, who knows?—and he 'ooks it. Yes, gents, he's stepped it—depend upon it, he has."

Then all of a sudden Lucy's voice was heard in the hall below.

"Are they up stairs? Let me go to them at once!" she cried, bursting into the room. "I have news of him. He *did* come to the house; it *was* his hand I heard on the bell; his last visit was to me; he must have had foul play. Oh, dear sirs, perhaps it isn't yet too late!"

"But, young lady," said Mr. Brass, "where did you get this bit of evidence?"

"From Mrs. Robinson, of Trinity Square. I knew John called there sometimes. He had a friend there, formerly a curate, who lodged there, and I went there to ask for him; and she saw him—at least not she, but her daughter—saw him go into our door, the yard door, you know, last night at nine, or soon after."

"And what is the daughter's name?"

"Patty, Patty Robinson."

Mr. Brass noted down the name and address, and then took his departure. If, indeed, John Jones had entered the yard of the Ebbsfleet Wharf soon after nine on the Sunday night, and had not been seen to come out, while the inmates of the house denied all knowledge of him, it looked queer. But even yet Mr. Brass didn't look kindly upon the case. The young man had absconded, and would turn up again in the most prosaic way, robbing everybody of their respective shares in his bounty money. Still it was a matter on which to keep an eye.

Lucy, meantime, had looked often and wistfully at the archdeacon. John had talked to her so much about his father and his godfather—she recognized them both by his description of them—and she had looked forward to their coming half in delight and half in trepidation. On the one hand, she had felt that to be received by John's father as his daughter would be one of the most delightful of experiences; on the other, she had shrunk shyly from the strangeness and stiffness of such a meeting. But that in John's father she would find a man who would not acknowledge her as a daughter had never occurred to her; and even in her grief and trouble at John's disappearance she felt an additional heart-ache at the coldness and formality with which she had been treated. Perhaps she had not sufficiently explained herself. It might have been an unmaidenly thing to come unaccompanied to her lover's rooms, to introduce herself unasked to his relatives,

In her anxiety and trouble such things had been forgotten; she would explain to these two gentlemen, who looked so embarrassed by her presence, why and how she had forgotten them.

"Sir," she said, addressing the archdeacon, "perhaps I ought not to have come to you here; but when I found that John had disappeared"—

"Disappeared!" cried Sir Pantlin, testily; "the boy hasn't disappeared."

"That John had not come home last night, for I felt very uneasy ever since I heard his ring last night, and he not there—oh, I felt such a chill and shock! and when—you know how one can't shake off these forebodings—I found he really had not been heard of since then—oh, I felt sure something had happened, and I came here to find you and tell you what I know; for you know," said Lucy, blushing and looking down, "that I am to be his wife."

"Ahem, yes," said the archdeacon, coughing and choking. He had felt very guilty and troubled ever since he had heard about the ring at the bell, knowing how surely the errand on which he had sent his son had turned him away from that doorway, within which would have been safety for him that night. He had thought meanly, even suspiciously of these Hulses, as people who had entrapped and deceived his boy. But he couldn't think meanly of Lucy as she stood before him in her purity and grace and helplessness. With the same trouble they were both pale and wan. For the same grief were their eyes suffused with tears.

The archdeacon looked at Sir Pantlin; Sir Pantlin looked at the archdeacon.

"Bless you, my dear," said Sir Pantlin at last, blowing his nose and coughing and spluttering. "Bless you, we've heard all about you, my dear. Only find the boy—only find him, my darling—and he shall marry you to-morrow—yes, by jingo! Eh, archdeacon?" he cried, turning fiercely upon his friend.

"Oh dear, oh dear, we shall never, never look upon his face again!" cried the archdeacon, shaking all over with excitement.

"Nonsense!" whispered Sir Pantlin. "Nonsense, Jack! you frightened the boy away by your harshness. Why the deuce couldn't you let the lad have his own way—a sweet girl like that, too? Begad, Jack, I'm ashamed of you!"

"Anwyl dad!" cried the archdeacon; "and you were worse against it than any body. But, oh, my dear, help us—help us two poor old men, who are half distracted—help us to find our boy!"

CHAPTER XII.

"Here's a knocking indeed!"

Nor a trace could they find of the Reverend Mr. Jones. He had vanished, gone out of existence apparently, utterly and completely lost.

Lucy Hulse was in a state of restless miserable agitation; at one moment conjuring up all kinds of dreadful events that might have happened; at another persuading herself that all her misery was uncalled for. He was coming, was here this moment! That footstep which echoed along the street, was it his?

It was trouble heaped upon trouble, too, to find that she was utterly cut off from the sympathy of her friends. What could it be that had raised up between them and her this cold wall of stupor or indifference? Her mother thought of nothing but of her father; he, sullen and morose, seemed utterly lost to all outward impressions. But her brother's attitude to her troubled her most. Instead of active, hopeful help, he gave her nothing but discouragement. He even ventured to cast aspersions on John. Perhaps he had repented him, he suggested, and gone off, like a coward, to avoid carrying out his promise—her John, who was half saint and half hero. No, not from her brother, not from any one, would she hear any slur cast upon her lover!

Thus she flitted about, restless and uneasy, like a bird deprived of her young, questioning all she met, reproaching every one with indif-

ference. Her brother she continually followed and watched. There was a reserve in his manner that made her think he knew something, and concealed it from her.

Edward didn't leave the premises the second day after the fatal Sunday. He spent the whole time in the old warehouse in his workshop. He went out to a timber-yard and selected some oak planks, and then on to a packer's a friend of his, from whom he begged a few strips of iron banding and a roll of water-proof cloth. As he entered the postern with his load under his arm, he met his sister.

"What have you got there, Edward?" she cried sharply.

"Going to make a box for my tools," he said.

"And that water-proof?"

"To keep the damp from them."

"Oh!" she said, but watched him narrowly still.

Edward himself took some precautions. He barred the outer door securely with its rusty old bars, examined the fastenings of the rotten shutters, and then set to his work energetically. He came in at meal-times. His appetite didn't seem to fail him. But he was altogether changed and altered. He never whistled or sang, but went about in a dull melancholy way that was wretched to witness. But he still stuck to his carpenter's work.

Tap, tap, tap, Ned's hammer had gone all the morning, till at last Captain Blackman, the director, whose turn it was to attend at the offices of the Company, to look over the books and sign the necessary checks, threw open the window of the counting-house, and shouted:

"Warehouse ahoy! You in the carpenter's shop!"

The warehouse door was presently held ajar, and Edward's white face appeared.

"Hol it's you, Master Ned, is it, kicking up that confounded din! Are you making a coffin?"

Edward came forward, locking the door carefully behind him.

"I'm making a tool-box, that's all, Captain Blackman," said Ned; "but if my noise disturbs you, I'll leave off."

"Well, you see, mate," said the captain, jumping off his office chair, and beginning to stamp on the floor to restore the circulation of his limbs, "I'm adding up these blessed books; and when I get to the bottom of the ladder and say carry one, that confounded hammer of yours comes in tap-a-tap-tap, and I carry two instead—ay, perhaps three—and then it's all wrong. There, take the confounded books," cried the captain, pushing them away from him; "humbugging purser's work; tot 'em up for me, there's a good chap. I never made a long row of figures come to the same thing twice in all my life."

Edward took his seat at the desk, and began to add up the figures for the captain. They were all right—each column added up the right amount—and yet the figures seemed to gather bulk with unnatural rapidity. They were his father's figures, neat and plain. Fleetwood took great pains with his figures, and prided himself upon their legibility. At last, in turning over a leaf, Edward suddenly came to a knowledge of what these figures meant.

Did he start? Did he turn pale? Were the eyes of Captain Blackman fixed upon his face? Had he in any way betrayed what he had seen?

The captain laid his hand upon Edward's arm, who started guiltily.

"I've been wondering how you run up those figures as you do. Don't it make your head ache? Lay by, my lad, a bit, and spin a yarn with me."

Edward put away the book with a sigh of relief. He had a few moments now to think. What was this he had discovered in his father's books? Simply that he had carried forward a hundred pounds too much at each turn of the leaf; not on those pages which were opposite one another, but where the pages turned over; there the hundred pounds was slipped on. That was how he intended to make up his deficiency. And if Captain Blackman took to add up the

figures again, he might discover it; and then everything would be lost.

"We're going to have great improvements here," said the captain; "we shall be turning you out of your workshop directly, Master Ned."

"How's that?" cried Edward.

"Oh, we're going to pull the old place down."

"Pull it down—why? Don't pull it down, Captain Blackman."

"Ha! and pay a couple of hundred a year for a tool-house for you—tool-house and dog-kennel, eh? How's the old dog now—Scipio? Quite blind, is he? Ah, we all get old and worn out. Your father and I are wearing out like the rest. But he don't look so hearty as me, Ned. Quite peaky he's been the last few weeks. And you too, my lad, you don't seem half as hearty as you should."

"Father wants a change of air, I think," said Edward.

"Well, why don't you take him off somewhere? The yard will be all in a mess for the next few days, what with the workmen and the old lumber."

"So soon—do they begin so soon?"

"Why not, why not? What should they wait for? Rickety old place; it positively isn't safe. The city surveyor has been warning us about it, and down it comes."

"Then," said Ned, knitting his brows together, "I'll take the opportunity to get father away for a change. To the Isle of Wight, I think."

"Quite right, my lad; good men are scarce; we can't afford to lose our old friend Fleetwood; but what he'll make of a holiday I can't think. Why, it's years since he left his desk for a single day!"

"Then, with your sanction, he shall take his holiday at once—from to-morrow, perhaps?"

"By all means," said the captain, cheerfully.

"And now, Ned, what about these books? They're all right, you say?"

"They are all right," said Ned, slowly.

"Couldn't be wrong; your father is so particular. Why, I remember once, Ned, he sat up half the night about a farthing! Oh, he's a valuable man, your father! Wonderful how he took to business, after his bringing up. Ah, what a pity old Paston didn't leave him something handsome in his will, instead of endowing those blessed idiots!"

"Yes, it was a disappointment to father," said Edward, with a sigh.

"I should think it was. Why, do you know, Ned, I thought you'd have been remembered in his will pretty handsomely. The very day he died he had a long talk with me about you and your father. He didn't like Fleetwood much; couldn't appreciate him. Fleetwood was a man of much higher position than Paston. But he took to you, Ned; and when I told him what a capital hard-working chap you were, and how saving and contriving, he seemed quite pleased and interested. And said I to myself, 'Ned's in for twenty thousand.' But he died that very day; you remember how suddenly."

Edward nodded, and a lump rose in his throat as he thought of the dreams and aspirations of those days, and compared the wretched, miserable present.

"Well, I'll leave these books now. I think I've done a pretty good morning's work, and I'll go and have a crack with your father, and you go back to your coffin-making."

"It's a tool-box, a box for my things; nothing else," cried Edward.

"Of course that was only my fun," cried the captain. "Good-day to you, Edward."

Ned's hammer went faster and faster till about five o'clock, when it was getting dusk; and then he went out to his friend's the packer's, and gave him some dimensions.

After dinner, when the Hulses were sitting silently round the fire, they heard the postern open, and a rumbling, roaring sound, like distant or stage thunder.

"What's that?" said Lucy, starting up, running down to the door—she was now sensitive to every sound. Edward followed her.

"It's only a tin box I've had made," he said,

as he saw a man advancing up the yard with a square tin case on his head, the loose and waving sides of which gave rise to thunderous vibrations. "Come this way," cried Edward, snatching up a lamp.

He led the man into the workshop in the old warehouse. The rumbling tin case fitted neatly into the wooden box that Edward had now finished. The sides of the tin case were higher than the sides of the box, so that they could be folded over the square tin cover; the whole well soldered down would form an air-tight, water-tight envelope.

"Shall I stop and help you to pack it?" said the man.

"No, thank you," said Edward.

"Then I'll come and solder it up for you in the morning, shall I?"

"Can't you leave your iron here, and your soldering pot? I should like to know how to do it myself."

"There ain't no secret in it; you puts a few bits of charcoal under her, and you melts the sodder, and then you folds over the tin nice and even, and then you runs the iron over all the crevices. Mind the corners specially; 'tis there it will leak if it leaks at all; and then the job's done."

"Thank you, my friend," said Edward, giving him a liberal gratuity.—"Good heavens, Lucy!" he cried, seeing his sister looking like a ghost, standing over the box at the farther end of it. "What do you want?"

"I want to know what you are going to put into that box?"

"Only my tools," said Edward. "Look here, Lucy, I can't have you rummaging about here, upsetting things. Come along; I'm going to lock up."

He took Lucy gently by the arm, and led her forth, locking the door behind him.

"I'm going out now," he told his sister, and made for the postern. At the moment he opened it Markwood appeared in the portal, his face agitated and distressed.

"Why, Ned," he whispered, coming in and shutting the door behind him, "what's this that has come out about you?"

CHAPTER XIII.

"Howsoever their hearts are severed, their heads are both one."

Mr. BILFIL had made up his mind that he ought to take some further steps with regard to his wife before he left England. It was absolutely necessary for his future welfare that he should stand well with the world on this matter. His conduct had hitherto been unexceptionable. It was necessary that he should put on record that it had been so.

Now, Paston, the lawyer, was a man of mark, and his version of the matter was one that most probably would be accepted by the world. If Bilfil could persuade Paston that he was in the right, and his niece hopelessly in the wrong, it would be a great advantage to him.

Mr. Paston, however, was still on the Continent. Under these circumstances, Mr. Bilfil condescended to make his statement to his confidential clerk. He knew Markwood very well, and he knew that in all such matters he had the ear of his chief.

Markwood was a man not at all indisposed for snug little dinners in vacation time. Mr. Bilfil knew of this amiable weakness—if it can be called a weakness. He knew, too, that Markwood didn't care for plate-glass and crystal and silver, but rather preferred some old-fashioned city tavern, with wooden boxes and benches, where one dined off willow-pattern plates, on succulent steaks and juicy chops, but where the ale is bright, and the stout creamy, and the whisky mellow, and where there is still to be had a bottle of good old port.

Such a banquet did Bilfil prepare for Markwood; and when it was finished, and Markwood's face was glowing with satisfaction at the fare, and his mind full of all sorts of social impulses, he proposed that Markwood should finish off with a pipe and a "go of cork" in the little

smoke-room up stairs. There was no one in the room when they entered.

It was a little dull room, containing three or four oblong mahogany tables, fixed to the floor, on each of which were placed a tin match-box in the centre and a surrounding quadrangle of long clay pipes. Half a dozen Windsor chairs, flanked by a couple of polished horns containing spills, and on the floor an indefinite number of spittoons, formed the furniture of the room. Its windows looked out upon a roof of ridged tiles, over which peered sundry upper story windows and a few chimney-stacks of besooted bricks.

Mr. Bilfil seated himself with his back to the window, while Markwood took his place at the opposite end of the table.

"Now, Markwood," said the financier, "I want to consult you about a private affair of my own. You knew all about the circumstances of my marriage!"

Markwood said that in a general way he knew that Mr. Bilfil had married the niece of Gilbert Paston.

Then Bilfil gave him an account of the circumstances attending his separation from his wife, admitting that he might have committed some faults in judgment in dealing with Mrs. Bilfil, but stating with perfect truth that she had left him without any adequate provocation, and had, in a very uncalculated way, employed as her negotiator young Hulse, her cousin and former lover.

"As for that," said Markwood, "I know that to be all right. There isn't a more honorable, straightforward fellow in the world than Ned Hulse. I don't see how he could help taking her part, being her cousin, and all that; but you may depend upon it he acted in perfect good faith. Why, he's engaged to be married himself—and to a very charming young girl."

"You mean to Patty Robinson, I suppose," said Mr. Bilfil, smiling sardonically.

"Oh, I saw them together on the boat, if you remember, on the day of our regatta."

"To be sure," said Markwood; "I remember now."

"Well, you know, that's all very well," said Mr. Bilfil. "I'm not going to cast stones against my wife; but a man cannot lose the tide of his success in life on account of an undutiful wife. My affairs compel me to start for America within a few days. Mrs. Bilfil chooses to keep herself concealed from me. I offered her the shelter of my home; even now I am prepared to come to terms as to her maintenance, if I am convinced that she is living in a regular and proper way. But I can't wait; before I leave this country I must place the matter in the hands of my lawyer to arrange for a legal separation, unless I receive from her a full submission and explanation. Now I want to stand well with you and Mr. Paston. Tell me if I can do otherwise, with justice to myself."

Markwood wrinkled up his face into all kinds of queer puckered lines.

"Tell you what, Bilfil," he cried at length. "Wait for a day or two. Leave it in my hands, as a mutual friend; by to-morrow evening you shall know all about it. You may safely trust me with your interests; and if I should be the means of bringing two estimable people together again."

Mr. Bilfil shook his head. "I don't see much chance of that," he said. However, I'll leave the matter in your hands. You will ascertain, at all events, the basis on which we can treat; and, if negotiations fail, you can testify which side is to blame."

Markwood, who delighted in the skilful conduct of a negotiation, shook Bilfil warmly by the hand, and presently they separated—Markwood making his way into the City to take initiatory steps in the matter.

In the first place, he had to find out Mrs. Bilfil. The most direct way would have been to go to Edward Hulse, and ask him; but this was hardly diplomatic enough for Markwood. Edward would probably feel himself bound in honor to refuse to disclose the lady's retreat. But in all probability he had confided the matter to Patty Robinson. To the Robinsons' house

he would go; and if he failed to extract the secret from the women-folk there—why, then his tongue had lost his cunning.

Under favorable aspects Trinity Square is not an uncheerful neighborhood. In the centre is a green inclosure, with trees and shrubs, among which children disport themselves, and the houses roundabout are of comfortable build and proportions. True, indeed, that the advancing tide of trade has encroached upon the living interest of the place, and that tall desks, and heavy ledgers with massive bindings, and smart young clerks and bearded merchants, have usurped the place of human families. But the general aspect is unchanged; it is in appearance a comfortable, old-fashioned residential square, with certain peculiar features of interest about it. On the higher side of the square is a classic temple dedicated to Neptune, served by certain priests known as Elder Brethren—the Trinity House, indeed. Over the way is a square official-looking building, severe in its simplicity—known by a huge brass plate on its portals, as the Inland Revenue Office; and beyond that, embayed by a promontory of public-houses, is Tower Dock—a dry dock now, indeed; a paved square space where fisher carts and vans await the flood of Billingsgate. Then there is the Tower, the white fort on London Pool; hoary with memories, but, sooth to say, less venerable in aspect than many a younger fortress.

Markwood cast a recognizing glance around for he was not unacquainted with these latitudes. He knew a salesman or two in Billingsgate, and often, in the fine summer mornings, had made purveying forages among the rude denizens of the market, carrying off surprising bargains in huge cod, lordly salmon, and aldermanic turbot. Then he was hand-and-glove with two or three Beef-eaters at the Tower, was on speaking terms with a venerable Elder Brother, and on nodding terms with all his pretty Semitic younger sisters in Houndsditch. Altogether, Markwood could have lounged away an hour or two very pleasantly in the neighborhood; but he was now intent on business, and made his way to a corner house of red brick, in whose windows was a notification, "Apartments to let," while a plate on the door bore the name of Robinson.

"How do you do, ma'am?" he said, politely, as a thin, elderly female opened the door to his ring and knock. "How do you do, ma'am?—and how's Miss Patty? And Robinson—is he pretty well?"

Mrs. Robinson acknowledged that there was no serious illness in the house; but she looked doubtfully on Mr. Markwood, and didn't ask him to enter.

"I should like a few words with you, ma'am. Our mutual friend, Mr. Edward Hulse—capital fellow, Ned; I know all about it, you see!"

"Oh, if you come from him, step in."

"I can hardly say I come from him," said Markwood, establishing himself in the hall, taking off his gloves, putting them inside his hat, and hanging that up in a peculiar confident way. "If he'd known I was coming, he'd have sent all kinds of messages, I've no doubt. But he didn't; for, to tell you the truth, I wouldn't let him know—for in matters of this kind things are often better done by third parties—friends of every body concerned, aren't they, Mrs. Robinson?"

Markwood, it is needless to say, was sparring for wind—trying to keep Mrs. Robinson's mind engaged while he established a footing in her good opinion. The lady of the house coughed doubtfully, and said that she thought there were a good many things wanted explaining and putting to rights.

"So there are," said Markwood; "and first and foremost about Mrs.—eh? You understand."

"Come into my parlor, sir," said Mrs. Robinson, "which is disengaged at this present moment." She led the way into a room on the ground-floor, with faded carpet and hangings, and old-fashioned mahogany furniture. "You mean about Mrs. Balfour, I suppose?"

"Balfour—yes, of course," said Markwood, eagerly. "I know it's a matter that may seem strange to you, and I want to put it right."

"Well, sir, I don't see what I can object with me to let my first floor, as has been empty a good while; and, what with rents and rates, and taxes, there's little profit, I assure you, Mr. Markwood, in lodgers. But it's worse when you haven't got 'em. Still I wasn't best pleased when Edward brought her here; no more Patty wasn't neither, when she came to hear of it, as was at Margate when the lady came."

"I assure you, madam, there isn't the slightest cause for any uneasiness. Ned Hulse is a lad who is as true as steel; the lady's a near relation, and in peculiar circumstances; therefore Ned has taken her part. Now here I am representing everybody—uncles and husbands, and Ned Hulse, and you, too, ma'am, and Miss Patty. I'm here to make arrangements that will prove satisfactory to everybody. But I must see Mrs.—you know, eh? Is she at home?"

Mrs. Balfour was at home, and there would be no difficulty in Mr. Markwood's seeing her. Mrs. Robinson would take her his card.

Markwood rubbed his hands with delight at the prospect of accomplishing his mission so speedily and well. He felicitated himself, too, on his skilful diplomatic maneuvers; although, in truth, fortune had aided him very much in the matter.

Margaret Bilfil sat at her second-floor window, listlessly watching the coming on of night, the gradual shrouding and wrapping up of the living world about her, the wilderness of houses fading away into a lurid haze, a white mist from the Surrey marshes blotting out the tracery of spars and rigging and masts, the white turrets of the keep of the gloomy stronghold alone rising into distinctness. She watched the gradual approach of the all-encompassing gloom in a nervous agitation that was almost terror. She felt so lost and lonely in the center of this huge city. How narrow was the interval between her and a state of absolute want, destitution, and starvation! For the moment she had a roof to shelter her, but how insecure her tenure even of this! She saw from the way in which she was treated by Mrs. Robinson how insecure her position, in what way people would regard her, what sneers she would encounter, what innuendoes, what polite or impolite cold-shouldering. If those who submitted themselves in all things to the dictates of society, and studied only to accommodate themselves to its humors, could barely assert for themselves the right to live, what chance was there for her, who had set at naught one of its most fundamental canons? Edward, too, seemed to be deserting her. She had received a hurried note from him that night. He was going out of town, he said, and unfortunately could not advance her any money on her uncle's account, as he had a sudden call upon all his available means; but he recommended her to apply to Mr. Markwood, her uncle's confidential clerk and agent, who would no doubt supply her wants.

But how could she go to her uncle's clerk and enter into these humiliating details! And even if she could convince him she was not a swindler, how could she ask him to advance moneys that might never be repaid! For her uncle Tom was as hard as adamant on some points. If he thought her to blame in leaving her husband—as she was pretty sure that he would—he would inexorably close his heart and his purse-strings against her. Altogether her prospects seemed so dark and hopeless that she abandoned herself to despair; and turning away from the window, into which the lamps of the street were beginning faintly to shine, she threw herself upon a squat and slippery horse-hair couch, and embracing a cold, hard cylinder, that was by courtesy a cushion, she sobbed aloud in the bitterness of her spirit.

At this moment Mrs. Robinson knocked at the door, and opening it immediately afterward, announced a visitor for Mrs. Balfour, a Mr. Markwood.

Margaret eagerly rose. She was thankful for the darkness that concealed the traces of her tears. At a bound she passed from despair to hope; she was not entirely forsaken and abandoned—he must be a good angel, this Mr. Markwood.

"Show him up, please, Mrs. Robinson," she said; "and bring me candles also."

Markwood, who had a good deal of chivalry in his nature, was touched at the sight of Margaret's beauty and evident distress. His heart warmed to her, and he forgot all about his diplomacy, his position as mutual friend and adviser. From that moment he became an unscrupulous partisan.

"I have heard of you, Mr. Markwood," said Margaret, giving him a comely white hand; "you seem to be a friend although I don't know that I have ever seen you before."

"Bless you, my dear," said Markwood, his eyes quite moist with emotion, "if there's any thing a devoted friend can do for you, you may count upon me as the man."

The contagion of sympathy overpowered Margaret also.

"I know you are good, Mr. Markwood," she cried; "I can see it in your face; and indeed I stand in need of a friend, for I have none, and I don't know what to do."

Then she told him all her story, and asked him for his advice.

"Well, madam," he said, "I came here to offer you certain terms on Mr. Bilfil's behalf, but I won't even tell you what they are. I can't advise you to return to him. Wait, I advise you, till your uncle comes back. I'll take care that he shall know the real state of the case; and in the mean time, ma'am, you will confer a personal obligation on me if you will honor me by accepting a loan sufficient to carry you on with comfort."

"You are very kind," cried Margaret. "Why should you take all this care for me?"

"Because, ma'am it's my duty. Don't talk of obligation, ma'am; I'm only too proud to have the chance of serving Mr. Paston's niece."

"But, after all, if he doesn't approve of what you've done—if he casts me off, and he may do"—

"I'll cast him off if he does, ma'am," said Markwood, indignantly. "No, no, ma'am; don't make yourself uneasy."

"But I am uneasy; and at the best it galls me to think of being dependent upon his breath for my living. Now, can't you, Mr. Markwood, suggest to me some way in which I can make a living for myself?"

Mr. Markwood puckered up his face and thought for a while. "Well, ma'am," he said at last, "I should be deceiving you if I told you there wasn't a difficulty. You see, the first thing that's asked when you want a situation is—what are your references, what similar places have you had, and so on."

"Well," said Margaret, "I used to teach before I married. I could refer to those people who employed me before."

"They knew about your marriage, I suppose, ma'am?"

"Yes, I think they all did."

"Then don't you think they'll be sure to mention it? And then you'd be asked if you were a widow, and so on. And, excuse me, madam, but when it was found you were separated from your husband, you'd find a difficulty."

"But there must be a way out of it."

"One way has occurred to me, ma'am," said Markwood. "And although it isn't what you might look for fairly, yet, perhaps, it's better than nothing. I'm a widower, ma'am, with a family of young children; I do the best I can with them, but they're almost too much for me—the girls especially. Now I am not in very ample means, ma'am, but still I have a comfortable house, and enough to keep the pot boiling. I have been thinking for some time that I really must have an experienced governess to keep the lasses in order, and to give 'em lady-like manners, and so on."

"And you were thinking of me? Indeed you are too good. If I am only fitted for it, I shall be so happy. I shan't want much salary, Mr. Markwood—enough to buy clothes and gloves, and pay my laundress. Oh, do you really think I shall do?"

Mr. Markwood enthusiastically declared that he was sure of it. Thus, as both parties were mutually inclined to the arrangement, there

was little difficulty in settling the preliminaries; only, as Markwood was now in lodgings at Henley, and had let his house furnished to the end of the month, the assumption by Mrs. Bilfil of her duties must be put off for a few weeks.

Then Margaret mentioned to Markwood the five hundred pounds which her uncle had left her, the interest of which would form such a comfortable addition to her income. There was no settlement made at her marriage, and Markwood feared that this sum was at her husband's disposal, and that he might do what he liked with it. "But perhaps," suggested Markwood, "I may shame him into giving it up. I'll go on to his office from here, and speak to him at once about it."

When Markwood reached Mr. Bilfil's office he found it closed for the night. He made friends, however, with the housekeeper, and persuaded her to let him write a note in Mr. Bilfil's private room, which he still continued to occupy, although he had ceased to have an interest in the business. When he had finished his note, he happened to see a slip of paper lying open on the desk above him. The name of Hulse caught his eye, and he read it almost involuntarily.

"Mem.—We've got a warrant *ne exeat* against Edward Hulse, and propose to make our capture to-night."

CHAPTER XIV.

"But I tell thee my heart bleeds inwardly."

"WHAT has come out about me?" cried Hulse, his heart standing still for a moment.

"What do you mean, Markwood?"

"Come, Ned, tell me at once, is it in the bounds of possibility that you may be on the point of being arrested for debt?"

Ned gave a deep sigh, half of relief, half of increased anxiety. "Why do you ask?" he said.

"Oh, Ned," said Markwood, "I was sure you would have said No plain and plump, and I half hoped you'd want to hit me on the nose for suggesting such a thing. Ned, it can't be you—such a steady, creditable fellow—you we think so much of at the office. It can't be."

"It is, though," said Ned, shaking his head sadly. "I have had a writ served upon me, but I don't see how they can put me in prison yet."

"Well, somebody's filed an affidavit that you're thinking of leaving the country—a lie, no doubt, but the thing's done every day. What have you been doing—going stark staring mad?"

"Not quite, Markwood. Put my name to a bill for a friend, that's all."

"Oh, Ned, I didn't think you'd be such a fool. How much is it?"

"Three hundred pounds."

"Oh, dear, dear! If it had been fifty pounds or so, I'd have done it for you somehow, but three hundred! Ned, you were mad!"

"It's no use talking about it, Markwood; that won't mend it. I'm done for, that's all. So good-by, Markwood; for I shall never show up at the office again. I've thought a good deal of your opinion, Markwood, and you've always been kind to me and took my part. Well, I never should have distinguished myself, but I did look forward to an honest, straightforward career. That's all over now. Say good-by, and leave me to my fate."

"No, I'm hanged if I do," said Markwood. "What sort of a chap should I be if I deserted a friend because he'd got into a hole? Why, cheer up, man; I've known fellows in fifty times worse dilemmas, and yet pull through. You haven't murdered anybody, Ned, that you should look so glum."

Ned groaned. "I don't know which way to look, Markwood; it seems all black."

"Fiddle-sticks!" cried Markwood. The gloom had vanished from his face, and it glowed again with delight at having to help a friend. "Why, it's so lucky, you know, Ned, it should happen

just now—long vacation, and the chief away, and everything as right as it can be. All we've got to do is to dodge the bailiffs, and then, Ned, if they can't get hold of you, they'll compromise the thing. I dare say they'll settle for fifty pounds when they find it's all they can get. There, let me think a bit, Ned. Shoot the bolt of the door, lest we should be surprised. Tell you what, Ned, we'll meet 'em this way—we'll file an affidavit against theirs that you've never intended to leave the country, and we'll put in good bail for your appearance, and then they can't touch you till their writ has run its course. How long do they give you, Ned?"

"Twelve days."

"Ah, then we've got a little time to look about us; we can work them in that time. I shall come the high horse, and hint prosecution for perjury, and so on. Come, Ned, give me your word of honor first, for the form of the thing, that you won't make a bolt of it, and I'll see you through it, my boy."

But Ned's face was still overclouded and downcast. "No, I can't give my word, Markwood; I've got into a mess, and I won't drag you into the mire, too—besides, there are other reasons."

"Well, then, you are an unaccountable donkey," cried Markwood. "I give you up, Ned; I give you up."

"I can't help it," said Hulse; "you must give me up. It's only right you should."

"Well, then, I won't," said Markwood; "I won't let you go and cut your own throat. Just think of your sister, Ned, and how she wants somebody to stand by her now and comfort her, and your mother too, full of trouble and anxiety; and think how much misery you'll give them. What'll become of them all if you break down too?—only your father, who might drop off any minute, between them and destitution. Just think of that, Ned, and be guided."

"I won't be guided," said Ned; "I've thought it all over till I'm nearly mad, and I've come to a conclusion. I mean to get away to-night, to make a bolt for America."

"And so you're going to cut yourself adrift from all the old faces, eh? No more days on the river, no more nights at the play, no more whist, no more smoke, no more anything. Well, Ned, I'd hoped better things; and if I'd been younger, I'd have grieved more. Good-by, my boy, and God bless you."

Ned wrung his friend's hand, and tears suffused his eyes as he remembered that he was thus taking leave of his old happy life; that there was nothing before him now but the gloomy despair of a hunted, miserable life. To himself how tragic this scene, shadowed with the hidden mystery and the overwhelming sense of an irrevocable guilty deed! Cut off and singled out from the herd, without warning or preparation, to be hunted for dear life; only the strong necessity of his position, which made it impossible for him to turn either to the right or left, kept him to the chosen track.

CHAPTER XV.

"In eleven good instances out of a dozen,

'Tis the husband's a cur, when the wife is a cat."

HARDLY had Markwood left the apartments of Mrs. Bilfil before Margaret was disturbed by another knock. Mrs. Robinson again.

"Oh, miss—beg your pardon, ma'am, I mean," with a cough—"my daughter would wish to speak a few words with you."

"Let her come up," cried Margaret. She had met Patty once or twice about the house, and had noticed that she was a fine, handsome girl. She felt a little bitterness against her. Not that she had received any injury at her hands, but she could hardly forgive Patty for having expelled her own image from her cousin Edward's heart. He, indeed, had never held any place in hers; but she valued the trophies of her power, and had been disappointed that he had been so easily consoled.

For her part, Patty had always objected strongly to Mrs. Bilfil. She wouldn't allow that it was right for a wife to leave her husband under any circumstances short of fear for her life;

even a beating she couldn't think to be a lawful and sufficient ground. As far incompatibility of temper, why, her father and mother quarreled violently every day of the week, and yet were a sufficiently happy couple. There was a considerable amount of jealousy also at the bottom of her dislike, for she couldn't help thinking that Edward must have retained a sneaking fondness for his cousin, to take so much pains about her welfare.

Patty, entering the room, felt a quick pang of lively mistrust as she looked upon Margaret. For although in personal appearance Patty knew that she held her own, yet there was an undefinable air of style and ease about Mrs. Bilfil that she felt herself wanting in. She knew herself awkward and *gauche* in the presence of her quondam rival, and the knowledge didn't tend to put her in a better frame of mind.

"How do you do?" said Margaret, advancing and holding out her hand. "We must be friends, for we shall be cousins by-and-by, I suppose. You see, I have heard of you from Edward."

"Yes," said Patty, doubtfully.

"He is a dear fellow, Edward; he behaved splendidly in my affairs. I don't know what I should have done without him. He has told you, no doubt."

"Yes," said Patty again; and here the conversation came to an awkward break. Patty didn't choose to discuss her lover's qualities with Mrs. Bilfil, who indeed, was rather too free-spoken to her mind.

"Are you comfortable?" said Patty at last.

"Comfortable!" echoed Margaret. "You have heard my unhappy story?"

"Only just the heads of it," said Patty; "that you couldn't get on with your husband; but I didn't mean that. I didn't suppose you could be comfortable in your mind. But the rooms; do you find them comfortable?"

"Oh, the rooms; yes, they are very nice. I don't look for luxuries; but they are nice and clean, and your mother does her best."

"Yes, mother's a very good hand at most things," said Patty.

Another awkward pause. And then Patty remembered what had brought her to see Mrs. Bilfil. She didn't know how to begin the subject, or how to put what she had to say, and so plunged into the middle of the affair without farther prelude.

"Oh, if you please, I've had a letter that has given me a great deal of sorrow. It's about Edward. I don't believe it. I'm sure it's all false; but it strikes me that you are alluded to in it, and I should like to know what it all means."

She slipped into Margaret's hand a letter. Mrs. Bilfil looked at the handwriting of the address, and turned pale. "Am I to read it?" she asked, in a trembling voice.

"If you please, ma'am; read it out loud, so that we can both hear it."

"Do you know who it is from?" said Margaret, glancing her eye at the signature for confirmation of the evidence of the handwriting.

"From a gentleman who has been paying great attentions to me," said Patty. "Not that I've had anything to say to him, only he's one of father's masters, as it were, and I don't like to offend him."

"Do you know who he is?" repeated Margaret, throwing back her hair and regarding Patty with mingled pity and indignation.

"Mr. Bilfil, of the *Daily Mentor*."

"My husband, girl."

"Oh, the villain! oh, the desperate villain!" screamed Patty; "and the told me he meant honorable. Oh dear, dear, what a wicked world!"

Margaret looked at Patty somewhat scornfully. "If you play with fire, you must expect to get your fingers singed. Here take the letter, Patty, and read it out to me; I haven't the patience to sit and look at that dreadful handwriting."

"Very well, ma'am, I'll read it," said Patty, submissively. She was a little sobered by the revelation she had just heard. That she should have two sweethearts who were gentlemen had been a little too much for Patty's equanimity.

Now to find that one of them had only meant to make a victim of her galled her to the heart. But she recovered her composure with an effort. Some sense of humor she had gave her nerve to read out the letter distinctly and boldly.

"SWEET LITTLE PATTY—I can't get the thought of you out of my head; and though you were so cruel to me when last I saw you, yet I fancy that when you come to know me, and find how deep my affection is for you, you will make amends to me by beginning to care for me a little. Give up that young cub, Patty: you know whom I mean. I have been making inquiries about him. I assure you had I found him an honest fellow I would never have spoken to you again in the way of love; but I find that not only is he desperately embarrassed, but that he is also of the worst moral character: he has inveigled away from her trusting husband a gay, flaunting foolish wife!"

"That's you," said Patty, dropping her hands, and looking Margaret full in the face; "that's you."

"The villain!" cried Margaret.

"Wait a bit; listen to the rest. Where was I? Oh, 'Gay, flaunting, foolish'—no, that's not it; 'Inveigled away from'!"

"You've read that," cried Margaret, impatiently; "go on, go on."

"From her trusting husband a gay, flaunting, foolish wife, whom he has now under his protection. He isn't worthy of you, dear Patty; he isn't indeed. Cut him off root and branch. And now I have a little plan for you. I heard you say the other day that you had never seen the Isle of Wight. Let us spend a long day there, and talk over matters. I know it is holiday time with you. Come, dearest Patty, I will meet you at Southampton on Saturday, for I shall be there on business. Leave Waterloo by the 8.10 mail train, taking a first-class for Southampton, and I will meet you at the station. We will have a delightful long day on the island, and I will then reveal to you all my plans for our mutual happiness. I know you love flying about, and indeed you should have wings to make you complete. Patty, darling, I know that girls are often very short of money, so you mustn't be vexed at my sending a five-pound note for your expenses, and to buy a new pair of gloves or so. Don't disappoint me darling, for I have set my heart on your coming. Give me just a line, and say, She will be there."

Margaret, whose chest had heaved, and whose countenance had changed many times during the reading of this letter, here snatched up a pen, and put it in Patty's hands; then, running to her desk, she took a sheet of note-paper and bade Patty write these words.

"She will be there."

"Now put this in an envelope, and take it to the post."

CHAPTER XVI.

STILL MISSING.

THE archdeacon and Sir Pantlin Jones had taken up their quarters at a hotel in the City, in order that they might be near the center of their field of investigation. As far as the archdeacon knew his son's acquaintance with London streets was confined to the immediate neighborhood of his curacy in the City, and it was thereabouts that there was the most probability of gaining intelligence.

The disappearance of the curate of St. Savel's had been taken up in earnest now. His friends had offered a reward of a hundred pounds for such information as might lead to the discovery of his fate. The press was beginning to take an interest in the matter.

"The Mysterious Disappearance of a Clergyman" was a leading heading of the bills of contents of the morning papers. The vendors of the evening papers chanted the same refrain,

and hinted at startling disclosures to be revealed by the purchase of their journals.

Sir Pantlin was quite worn out by the search, and sighed in vain for the tranquil shades of Pumptristaint. All day long there were interviews—with lawyers, with the police, with purveyors of intelligence. In the morning Sir Pantlin waited upon the Home Secretary; after luncheon he went to see the Chief Commissioner of Police; his dinner-time was invaded by Mr. Brass, the detective. Bodies, too, must be visited—damp, dripping bodies lying at riverside public-houses; livid, swollen features, faces blurred and distorted, must be peered into and examined. But the end of it all was the same. There was no trace of John Jones.

The chief stress of all this business fell upon Sir Pantlin. The archdeacon was overcome with grief and apprehension; he had no nerve to face the constant torture of investigation.

It was seven o'clock in the evening, and Sir Pantlin had just come in dressed for dinner; he wore a blue coat with brass buttons, a frilled shirt front, in which was a sparkling diamond brooch; a tall shirt collar was enveloped in many folds of white lawn, the ends of which were tied under his chin in a small bow. His waistcoat was of some soft, yellow stuff; his trousers were shaped tight to the calf, and a pair of shoes tied with strings completed his attire.

"Does the archdeacon know that dinner's on the table?" he cried, sharply, to the waiter.

"I'll see, sir," said the man, disappearing.

Sir Pantlin turned to the pier-glass, and began narrowly to scrutinize a piece of black court-plaster which he had just affixed on his new-mown chin.

"I wish the boy would come back," he muttered to himself. "He's killing his father and me too. As for his having disappeared, that's all nonsense. I know what young men used to be. I disappeared myself once, and came back without a penny in my pocket or a rag to my back; but then I wasn't a parson, with an archdeacon for a father. Here he comes. Well, my old friend," he cried, turning round to the doorway, "how do you find yourself by this time?"

The archdeacon looked pale, thin, and worn; he seated himself at the dinner-table in a feeble uncertain way, tasted a spoonful of soup, and fell into a brown study.

"Cheer up, old friend," cried Sir Pantlin. "Take a glass of sherry with me, and don't look so despondent. I'll bet that John is taking his sherry somewhere, too, and is laughing at us old fools for the fuss we have made."

The archdeacon shook his head.

"I've no hope of that, Pantlin; I know John too well—his careful, prudent nature."

"You don't know what people's natures are when there's a girl in the case."

"Mr. Brass wishes to see Sir Pantlin," said a waiter, coming into the room.

"Show him up directly," cried Sir Pantlin, his mouth full of turbot and lobster sauce. "I'll not keep Brass waiting on any account. Sit down, my good fellow," he cried, as the detective entered the room; "sit down and take a glass of sherry, and let us hear what you have to say."

"Well, Sir Pantlin," said Mr. Brass, "they say as no news is good news, but it ain't always. In a case of this sort, when you don't come to the bottom of it quick, you don't come to it at all."

"Then you've no news for us, Brass."

"I don't say that, sir; there are circumstances as has happened that may mean nothing, or may mean a great deal."

"Well, what?" cried Sir Pantlin, impatiently.

"We've kept up a pretty good watch on those premises, but we haven't found out very much. The young chap has seemed a bit unsettled like, and hasn't gone to his work, and he's been tinkering about carpentering in the old tumble-down warehouse. He's been putting together a big case, as might—I won't say it is

meant for that—but it might hold such a thing as—a body."

Sir Pantlin shuddered; the archdeacon turned still paler, and got up and left the room.

"Another thing has come out, Sir, what looks queer. There's been other people looking after the young chap. He's in a regular mess, and they want to nab him and clap him in prison for debt; but he's too artful for 'em, I think. Anyhow, Sir Pantlin, my opinion is that the secret of this here business lies in Ebbsfleet."

"Then what do you mean to do?"

"That's for you to say, Sir Pantlin. If you direct me to go and take out warrants against the whole party of 'em, and give 'em no time to make everything square, I don't say but what you'd find out a good deal; but then there's the risk."

"I'm surprised to hear an officer of the crown talk about risk. Go and do your duty to your country, sir, and leave the rest to Providence."

"What, Sir Pantlin!" cried Brass, aggrieved; "do you mean to be 'sponsible for the whole business? What if I take 'em all into custody, and it turns out a mistake after all? A pretty kettle of fish there'd be, and the young chap a sucking lawyer. Why, there'd be costs and damages; and Mrs. B. and me might see our little bit of furniture sold up, and go and sit down in the workhouse to end our days. No, no, guv'nor—duty's duty, and your country's your country; but once you get into an 'ole, and your country will never pull you out. No, Sir Pantlin, not unless I get a written indemnity from you, I don't budge."

"Well, I'll see the archdeacon," cried Sir Pantlin. "It's his business more than mine."

After he had seen the archdeacon, Sir Pantlin said that he was prepared to give the required guarantee.

"And the young lady and the old lady—am I to make a clean sweep of it?"

"Well, no, poor things!" said Sir Pantlin.

"I can't think there's any guilt about the girl. No, no; you must leave the ladies alone."

"All right, Sir Pantlin. We'll keep a look-out on the place to-night, and by breakfast to-morrow you may expect to hear news."

CHAPTER XVII.

"SO WHITE, AND SUCH A TRAITOR!"

As soon as Markwood had gone Edward Hulse went to find his sister. It was clearly evident that instant flight was the only possible way of safety. And that required so many preparations! Could he trust Lucy to help him?

She was standing—it was almost dark—her face pressed against the window, as if watching for some one. When the door opened she turned eagerly round. Edward carried a candle in his hand, and he started as he saw how wan and drawn her face had become.

"Is there any news?" she cried.

"Of him? No," said Edward, shortly. "There is news of another kind. Come and sit here; I want to talk to you."

Lucy listlessly obeyed, and took a seat beside her brother, her head turned away from him, still listening.

"Lucy," said Edward, "If we went away, father and I, to America, all of a sudden, do you think I could trust you to take care of mother, and bring her over to us when we write for you to come?"

"Why should you go away suddenly?" said Lucy turning upon him quickly.

"Because father has got into difficulties, and I have got into trouble through him."

"I can't leave John," said Lucy, quite fiercely. "You wouldn't ask me to do that, as long as there's a chance."

"There's no chance," said Edward, gloomily.

"What do you mean? What have you heard? Oh, you know something: is he dead, Edward?"

"I know nothing of that, but I found something to-day—a letter; he must have dropped

it when he was here that morning. It is addressed to you."

She seized it eagerly. Yes, the handwriting was his, and the letter was addressed to her. She tore it open and read it by the flickering light of the candle:

FINSBURY, Sunday.

DEAR MISS HULSE—You can hardly imagine how harrowing it is to my feelings to write to you in this formal way. I assure you, if you knew how I suffer, you would pity me. But I am compelled by considerations higher than those of mere earthly affection to make my choice between you and the duties I owe to my father, my godfather and all my friends. Were I a man of independent means, I would throw all these to the winds, and sacrifice myself to make happy a girl who is all that a man could desire in a wife. But I am powerless. My father distinctly refuses his consent to my engagement. My godfather, Sir Pantlin Jones, Baronet, threatens to withdraw his countenance and patronage from me; and with that goes all chance of my succeeding to the living of Pumptristaint. I should be acting against the dictates of my conscience if I neglected their commands. Lucy—once more I must call you by that beloved name—Lucy, we must not meet again.

"No doubt you will ere long come in contact with some one better suited to your position, and more calculated to make you happy, than I. To-morrow—sad task!—I will look out all your letters and return them; please send mine back also. The trinkets I gave you, which, though small, are valuable, I hope you will retain in memory of one who loved not wisely, but too well.

"Ever your sincere friend,

"JOHN JONES."

"Well," said Edward, looking keenly at his sister, when she had finished, and set staring fixedly before her, "what do you think of him now? Is he worth grieving for?"

"How do you know what was in the letter? Did you read it?" she cried, flashing out upon him suddenly.

"I did," said Edward.

"How dare you, sir; how dare you! It was not true, Edward; it was meant in play. Do you see what he says, 'We must never meet again?' He came to me after that. Oh, if he meant it, he repented. I heard his step, I heard his knock. He came to see me last of all."

Lucy burst into tears and left the room.

"To think of her taking it like that!" cried Edward, in dismay. "Who will help me now? Where can I look?"

A loud knocking sounded at the postern-gate. Edward went to a window that commanded a view of the entrance, and looked cautiously out. There stood Markwood and Patty Robinson. He ran quickly down and opened the door.

"Well, I've brought her," said Markwood. "I'd a great job with her mother, who wouldn't let her come for ever so long; but here she is; take care of her, Ned. Now is there anything more I can do?"

"One thing," whispered Edward; "if you would hire a boat for me, and bring it round to the wharf at four to-morrow morning."

"Yes, I'll do that," said Markwood. "I know a man who'll let me have a boat at that time, and I'll be there. But what do you mean to do with the boat?"

"It's for father and me," whispered Edward. "The street is watched, I know; but the river isn't, I hope. I must risk it, at all events."

"You may rely upon me," cried Markwood; and he went away, whistling cheerfully.

"Now, Ned," said Patty, briskly, as soon as the postern-gate was shut and locked, "tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it."

"Listen, Patty. I'm going to take father off to America; and you must stay here to take care of mother and Lucy."

"Yes, that I can do after you are gone. But what can I do now? Have you made every thing safe for going? Is it all right in the warehouse?"

"Patty," he replied, laying his hand on hers,

"you have come far enough with me; don't come any farther. I have got my own work to do between this and then; don't seek to know what it is, but go into the house—go to mother; she is prepared to receive you as a daughter."

He pointed to the open door of the house, where a gas-light was burning in the hall.

"And you, Ned—where are you going?"

"Into the warehouse, Patty," he whispered, giving an involuntary shudder.

"Ned, you are cold and trembling. It is not fit for you to be working there alone. Let me come with you. I am not frightened at shadows."

"What I have to do to-night it is not fit that you should share."

"Ned," she cried, "what is fit for you is fit for me. I wasn't brought up a lady, you know, Ned, to be balancing and choosing whether this is proper or that is nice. You picked me out, Edward, and have stuck to me well. I mean to stick to you, Ned—through fire and water."

"I knew you would, Patty; but it is no use. I am lost beyond redemption. I shall only drag you down—down into the depths of my own misery. Patty, leave me."

"I won't, Ned; so don't be foolish. Why do you look so darkly on things? You know you have done no evil. That you struck that man down when he told you he was going to desert your sister, that was grand of you, Ned; I honor you for it. The rest you couldn't help."

"No, Patty, but I didn't meet it like a man. I concealed it, and that is as bad as crime. Why, Patty, half the evil deeds we hear of are done through cowardice, and I was a coward, and therefore a criminal."

"But, Ned, when you heard your sister's voice, and he her lover! Any one, every one, would have done just like you. But is it too late now? Aren't you afraid that you will fix yourself as a criminal—that suspicion will fall upon you? Wouldn't it be better to tell somebody about it at once, to have the thing explained?"

"It's too late, Patty. I don't so much mind for myself, but for the sake of the old folks, how could I give up? The circumstances are so strong against me, if I escape the—the—rope, Patty, I couldn't escape a long imprisonment; and what will become of them? I must get my father away; and, to do that, I must conceal it."

"Then I shall help you, Ned," cried Patty. "Come, don't stand swaying and balancing to and fro—there is a way out of every thing; let us find a way out of this."

So saying she put her arm within his and led him into the warehouse.

"Come, lead the way," she whispered.

The heavy doors clanged behind them; a pale ghostly light shone from the farther end of the long low room. It was the glimmer of moonrise through the windows of the workshop. Then they heard a chain clank, clank up in the topmost story, and strange shuffling steps, and then the rattle of chains, step by step, on the dark steep staircase.

Patty clung to Edward in terror.

"It's only Scipio," said Edward; "it's only the old dog." He struck a light and lit a candle in an old stable lantern. Then he passed along the room till he came to a ring let into the floor; he pulled at the ring and raised a trap-door. A black profound pit was manifest, from which sounded the splash and trickle of running water. Patty shrank back.

"Listen," said Edward, placing his lamp by the brink of the chasm. "There is nothing unearthly about this; the stream down there is the Fleet, from which Ebbsfleet takes its name. Look down there on the opposite side of this pit—do you see anything?"

He held the lantern so that its rays lighted up the sides of the gloomy chasm.

It had been a dock once upon a time, and seemed, from the solidity and strength of it, to have been built by a race of giants. The tide was now up, and the light of the lantern flickered on dancing waters far below. Just above the dark line of the tide-mark was a projecting stone, over which was a gloomy archway,

"We found it out, Lucy and I, not so long ago," whispered Ned. "Nobody knew of it but old Patson, and he never revealed the secret of it. But the day he died I think he must have been taken ill down there, for we found the trap-door open and the ladder across."

"Is there a ladder?" said Patty.

"Yes, look here." Edward bent down and pulled forward an iron ladder that swung upon a pivot, the foot of which fitted upon the projecting stone at the base of the arch.

"What does it mean?" cried Patty.

"There is a vault down there; old Gilbert Paston's vault. I believe that he made his fortune out of that vault, and there he hid the silks that he smuggled, right in the teeth of the Custom-house. Wait here, Patty; I will go down by myself."

"I will go with you," cried Patty; "I am not afraid. But, Edward, you say nobody knows of it but Lucy and you?"

"Nobody."

"Then why should you meddle with it? Let it be—the vault and that which is in it. Only the day of judgment will reveal it."

"To-morrow there will be workmen here, and the old place will be pulled down. The dock and the vault will be open to the light of day, and that which is hidden will be revealed. Patty, we must remove the evidence."

Patty nodded. "Lead the way," she said.

But before he could put a foot upon the ladder a tremendous knocking echoed through the building.

"It is somebody at the postern," cried Edward. "They have come at last; they have come for me."

"It is nothing," said Patty; "but I will go and see; and, Edward, you had better hide yourself in the vault; if people are searching for you, they will never find you there."

Again the knocking was loudly repeated.

"Make haste, Edward!" she cried. He disappeared in the chasm. Patty hastily shut to the trap, and ran out into the yard, as another shower of knocks descended on the postern.

"What do you want?" she cried, opening the door suddenly. A man stood there, a downcast, weather-beaten man.

"I want to speak to Mr. Edward Hulse," he said.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SECRET VAULT.

At the bottom of the iron ladder was a projecting stone; above that stone was an arched recess—simply an arched recess to outward appearance. Edward Hulse, however, knew better. He drew a key from his pocket, and, feeling carefully with his fingers for the spot, inserted it accurately into a joint of the apparent stone work. The whole side of the archway swung back. It was an iron door, painted so as to represent stone work. Within was a vault, with a groined roof and rude columns, sculptured in the walls. The air was dry and pure, and the bottom of the crypt was of fine white gravel. At the eastern end of the vault was a second archway; and this was closed also by an iron door studded with massive bosses, no attempt being here made to disguise the material.

Edward put down his lantern on the floor, and, leaning against the side of the vault began to listen eagerly. He thought he heard the tramp of men above his head; he told himself that these were the officers of the law; that they were searching everywhere for him; that they must find him at last, red-handed, as it were—his victim in the adjoining cave.

Yes, there he was. Edward saw him, in his mind's eye, as he lay in the farther vault, cold and stark and white.

As he stood watching and listening, the light from the lantern began gradually to grow less. The candle was going out. The thought of being left in darkness, the body of his victim close at hand, struck him with dismay. He had no other candle; he had no means of getting a light except by returning to the warehouse. This he dared not do. If a search were now

being made for him, he would betray at once himself, and the hiding-place of the body.

The candle went out, and he was left in total darkness.

Standing crouching against the wall, listening with painful intentness, of a sudden he heard something stir in the inner vault. A footstep it seemed to be; and that was followed by a groan.

A cold sweat came out all over him; his limbs trembled, his blood ceased to circulate. He was bound to the spot, it seemed, and could not move hand or foot. Then he heard hinges creak, and he felt that the door of the inner vault was swung open, and that something passed out.

At this moment a light shone under the door—the outer door of the crypt; some one was descending the ladder; the door was swung open. Patty appeared with a candle in her hand.

She gave a shriek as she passed in, and recoiled. She would have slipped and fallen back into the dock, but Edward, who had recovered his senses at her appearance, and had sprung forward to meet her, caught her by the arm and saved her. Then he saw that there was another form in the crypt—a spectre, it seemed—white, bloodless, with staring eyes—the murdered man, his victim.

Yes; it was the murdered man come to life again. After a moment's horror and incredulity, the conviction came to his heart in a rush of intense joy. He was not a man-slayer; the blood of this man was not on his hands.

"John," he cried, running forward with outstretched arms, "will you forgive me? O God! how glad I am!"

John recoiled, and waved him away with his hand. "If I am not dead," he said, "it is no thanks to you. Help me, young woman," he cried; "this man is a murderer."

Edward pulled to the door of the crypt, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

"Now," he said, "John, let us talk reasonably."

"Let me out first; let me out of this den of murderers, this horrible vault."

After the first revulsion of joy, the old troubles set in once more. Every thing began again. They were still at the mercy of this man—he and his father.

"John," went on Edward, "I struck you down indeed; but remember the provocation. Lucy, whom you deceived, is my sister. But I will say nothing about that now; that is all at an end."

"I am half dead with thirst and hunger," cried John. "Let me out."

"You shall have drink and refreshment; you shall be let out, John; but first you must make me a promise. I shall say nothing about Lucy; all that shall be as if it had never been. But, John, you must help me to save my father."

"What do you mean?"

"My poor father. He is old, you know, John, and half frantic with trouble. He has put your name to a bill. It shall all be paid; but

"He has forged my name?"

Edward nodded.

"Well, let me out, and I will see what I can do."

"No; I must have your promise, John; I must have your promise. Remember what it means: my father in prison—dying in a prison. Do you understand?"

"Let me out. I have been buried alive, man. Young woman, help me."

"Do as he tells you," said Patty. "Promise him not to hurt his father."

"Well, I promise; only give me drink and food."

Edward paused, irresolute. What was the worth of this promise, thus extorted? Would it be binding, even in a court of honor? What security should he take?

"John, I must have it in writing—an acknowledgment that you authorized father to write your name."

"Very well, in writing; only let me have some water."

"Edward whispered to Patty, "Is all right up aloft?"

"Yes," she said. "There was a man wanted you. I told him you had not come in yet, and he is outside waiting for you. But all is right in the yard."

"I will bring you food and drink John, and pen and ink. Patty, will you stay here?"

"Yes," said Patty. There was a tremor in her voice, however, that showed she didn't like it.

"What shall I do?" muttered Edward.

"Oh, I know now; I will fetch Scipio."

He went up the ladder and through the trap, and whistled for the dog. Presently he heard him coming down from the top room where he generally made his lair, shuffling and shambling, his broken chain rattling against the stair.

"I want you to come down this ladder, Scipio," said Edward, descending just before his nose.

Scipio felt with his paws, didn't like the insecurity of the ladder, whined and snuffed, but would not come down. Hulse took him by the collar, and dragged him down the ladder and into the crypt. Here he seemed to recognize the scent of his old aversion, and, bristling up, began to growl ferociously.

"John, go inside, into the inner room, and shut the door, or I'll not be answerable for Scipio. I'll bring you food and drink in a minute, but go in and get out of Scipio's way."

John made a hasty retreat into the inner crypt, and shut the door.

"Now Scipio," said Edward, "guard him."

As soon as he had gone the inner door opened, and the head of John Jones was cautiously protruded.

"Come here, young woman," he whispered; "I want to speak to you."

Scipio half raised his head and growled, but did not stir.

"Well, what do you want?" said Patty.

"I will give you fifty pounds if you will go and tell the police where I am, and tell them to send men to break open everything. When I am free you shall have fifty pounds—more than that, a hundred."

"But he has promised to let you go."

"I mistrust him, he means to leave me here, to be buried alive."

"It is too late," she said; "Edward is returning."

Edward reappeared, carrying with him bread and cold meat, a bottle of wine, and a jug of water.

"Don't trust him," whispered Patty, as he passed her on his way to the inner chamber.

Edward put down the food and drink before his prisoner, placing them on a stone bench that ran round the sides of the crypt. John fell to like a famished man.

"Why not trust him?" said Edward, softly, coming back to Patty.

"Because he means to deceive you. He has been trying to bribe me."

"What shall I do?"

"Leave him here for the present. He can't get out?"

"Certainly not."

"Nor make himself heard?"

"Impossible."

"Leave him here, then, till you get safe away—you and your father; then I will come and let him out."

"Patty, you are an angel of wisdom. He shall have a mattress to sleep upon and plenty of food, and in twenty-four hours we shall be out of reach of pursuit. Come, Patty, and help me to make things ready for our journey."

CHAPTER XIX.

"I am not mad; too well, too well I feel
The different plague of each calamity."

WRETCHED as Lucy Hulse had been while the fate of her lover hung in suspense, she was yet more miserable now that she had read that accursed letter. It poisoned all her thoughts of him. She would not believe that it represented his real mind—he had repented and come to

her once more. But that he should have harbored thoughts so selfish and unkind pierced her heart with ineffable pangs. She had set him upon a pedestal, half as hero, half as saint, and it was almost as bitter a pang to lose the ideal as the actual lover.

But in the midst of it all her intense desire to recover and rescue her lover—or, at all events, to ascertain his fate—came upon her with double force. Dreadful as was the thought that her brother was to be suspected of causing his disappearance, she had no alternative but to entertain it. How had he come by that letter? What was the meaning of his strange behavior of the last few days?

Whatever the secret might be, Patty was well acquainted with it. Patty had seen John Jones enter the yard, no doubt; she had never seen him leave it. Lucy was convinced that she had lied when she said so. Among them, and within the walls of Ebbsfleet, was the solution of the mystery to be sought. That she would come to the bottom of the mystery, Lucy was determined; what she would do if her worst fears were confirmed, and she found in her brother the assassin of John Jones, she refused to take thought of. That this very night something was being enacted, some secret proceeding in which she had no share, she felt convinced. Edward had introduced Patty to his home, had announced that she had come on a visit for a week or more, and her mother and father had received the intimation as a matter of course. Her mother had been crying all day, but she had been busy too; ever since Patty came there was a subdued bustle of preparation in the house. Trunks were being packed; linen was being got together, everything betokened some setting out on a journey. But Lucy was kept entirely in the dark as to the meaning of it all. And why?

They were all trying to screen her brother, to secure his escape. Why should they mistrust her, if they did not know that he was answerable to her for her lover?

That night at ten o'clock Lucy said good-night to the household, but instead of going to bed as usual, she wrapped herself up in a dark dressing-gown, and set herself to watch at an upper window that commanded a view of the yard. She had not been long at her post before she saw Edward moving across the yard. He went and unlocked the warehouse, and returned to the house. Presently he crossed the yard again. The moon shone out just at the moment, and Lucy saw distinctly that he carried a burden on his back. Quick as thought Lucy ran down the stairs and into the yard, but when she reached the warehouse door it was locked. The house door had been left open, and Lucy saw next moment that Patty stood in the doorway peering out into the yard, and she carried a basket in her hand.

Lucy hid herself behind a pile of drain-pipes, close to the warehouse door, and watched Patty, who tripped across the yard and knocked gently at the warehouse door.

Presently she heard the key turn in the lock, and Edward came out into the uncertain moonlight.

"What have you got, Patty?" he said.

"Oh, ever so many things; enough to keep one for a week."

"Does Lucy suspect anything, do you think?"

"I don't think so. Poor Lucy!"

"Yes, it's sad for her, but what can we do?"

Patty whispered something to Edward, who laughed.

That laugh hardened Lucy's heart against him.

"Now, Ned dear," said Patty, "good-bye till morning, and keep up your spirits."

Ned put his arm round her waist and kissed her.

Lucy shuddered. She remembered how John would thus put his arm round her; and of all this they had robbed her.

Patty ran across the yard and disappeared in the house.

Edward took a few turns up and down the

yard, and then went and stood on the margin of the wharf, and watched the turbid waters rolling downward to the sea.

When he had his back fairly turned to her Lucy ran across the space in front of the doorway, and passed into the old warehouse. A feeble ray of light gleamed at the end of the long low room. It came from her brother's workshop. She made her way toward it, trembling in every limb; perhaps she was to see the solution of this terrible riddle.

In the corner of the little workshop was a brazier of glowing charcoal and a soldering-iron. A strong smell of solder and the fumes of the charcoal made the atmosphere quite mephitic. There was nothing else to be seen in the room except the carpenter's bench, and a rude wooden seat. Was there nothing else?

Yes, there was the case clamped with iron. It was fastened up now, soldered up, and nailed down. It was the same box she had seen open not long before.

She looked hurriedly round to see if any means were at hand to open the box. Her gaze suddenly fixed itself upon the floor. There was a dark, fresh stain there, a hideous patch close by the vise; and there, caught between the leg of the bench and the iron of the vise, hung a glove.

It was a lavender kid glove, almost clean, as if it had been carried, and not worn; it was, John's glove, the right-hand one, that he used swing about by the fingers: thus he had so carried it on Sunday; and now—it was hardly toiled, but there was a spot upon it, a rusty discolored spot. Was it blood?

She could not reason, she could not think. She could only press her hands to her head, groveling on the floor, laying her head against the cold iron; and when she looked up she saw her brother standing over her, looking pale and menacing.

"Edward," she cried, "what have you done with him, what have you done with him?"

He answered not a word, but took her by the hand, and led her away.

The bell of St. Paul's tolled out the hour of midnight, and before the grand reverberations died away, all the clanging bells of all the churches in the city rang out with multitudinous voice.

"Lucy," said Edward, when he had locked the warehouse door behind him, "I hoped to spare you. The man is dead to you; you will never see him again. You must not desert your father, your brother, for such a man as that."

Lucy gave a wild, despairing cry, and ran toward the margin of the river. Everything was lost, everything—she had better die.

Edward caught her, and threw his arms round her as she stood on the brink of the dark river.

"Loose me!" she cried, "loose me! Your hands are red! let me go!"

He took her up and carried her into the house.

"Lucy," he said, "whatever I have done, I have done for you and my father. Don't blame me till you know all."

Lucy's overwrought sensibilities had given way; she could only sit on the stairs, and cry and moan and wring her hands. Edward looked round in despair.

Was this the home that had once been so placid and happy? Were those the stairs over whose balusters he had clambered as a boy? Was not all this an evil dream that the light of morning would dispel? No, it was all real; the morning would only bring danger, flight; perhaps escape into exile, perhaps capture and shameful imprisonment; and Lucy—what would become of her?

A light shone on the stairs, the only light in his darkness, for there was Patty's face looking down upon him, powerful, resolute, faithful.

"Leave your sister to me, Ned," she whispered, "and you go and get some sleep; you will want all your strength to-morrow—nay, to-day."

CHAPTER XX.

THE FLIGHT.

THE day had indeed come—the day of the begira. St. Paul's clock had just struck four, and opposite the wharf was the boat with Markwood in it, and Stimson, one of the yard men; they rested on their oars, paddling gently every now and then to hold their place against the tide, which was running upward. Dawn was approaching; white vapors were curling on the waters; over the mists the shadowy dome of St. Paul's rose indistinct in its grandeur. The golden cross was touched by the eastern glow.

Wrapped in a heavy cloak, shivering and trembling, Fleetwood Hulse, leaning on the arm of his son, tottered across the yard.

Edward looked at his father with strangely commingled emotions. For this man, bowed by age, frosted by many winters, trembling on life's utmost verge, he, his son, had sacrificed all the prospects and future of his young life. Was it right? Was this flickering flame of life worth such a sacrifice? Then, again, there came upon him a feeling of deep compassion. To this man, almost childish again by reason of his age, temptation had come, and at a time when all his faculties of resistance had been weakened. Gradual decadence, the narrowing of means at a time when the comforts of life seem doubly necessary, his eager desire to preserve for his children some vestiges of his former social position, his fiery temper that chafed under small pecuniary obligations—all these causes had hurried him into that fatal weakness.

Markwood tossed his oar as a signal that he was ready; a few strokes brought the boat to the side. Some packages were thrown in; Edward helped his father into the boat, and then turned to say good-bye to Patty.

"God bless you, Ned," she said. "Perhaps some day we may meet again."

Ned sighed; he couldn't say it was likely. He felt that this was a parting for evermore. He held her in his arms and kissed her on her lips; she clung to him for a moment, and then he was gone; the boat was speeding up the stream, half lost in the wreathing mists.

Away they went on the top of the tide, a pair of powerful oars urging them on. As they shot the arch of Blackfriars a six-oared boat was coming down through another arch. It was the police boat.

The men peered and stared, but they could make out nothing distinctly. They eased their oars, however, immediately; backed; began to turn in the tideway.

Markwood and his companion had laid to with a will; the six-oared boat was lost in the mist: a few moments brought them to the stairs by Waterloo Bridge. A barge that was moored there concealed the boat for a moment, and they saw the police boat go past at a swinging pace, right through the center arch of the bridge.

In a few moments they would be safe. Stimson shouldered the luggage and hurried them into the Waterloo Road. Markwood fastened up the boat, and followed at a more leisurely pace. No one followed them; the Waterloo Road was deserted. A dusty old clock in a grimy steeple by a frowsy iron bridge that spans the unlovely street still stood at its customary ten minutes past six; and Edward felt a spasm of momentary terror as he instinctively accepted its record as fact, and thought they were too late.

They reached the platform by the flight of steps on the river-side of the iron bridge. The station was dark and gloomy in the feeble light of foggy morning. Most of the offices were shut; a lamp burned in the booking-office, one or two were alight along the platform. A small knot of porters were getting in each other's way and confusedly doing nothing. A busy engine was in front, picking up carriages here and there and butting them on to the waiting train. A group of humble people—sailors, laborers, loafers—were clustered alongside.

Markwood was going to see them off at Southampton. When the steamer was fairly out to sea he was going back to tell Patty that all was right. Patty would know what that meant, and would go and release Mr. John.

The bell rang; Ned took his seat beside his father in a third-class carriage. He—grim, sulky, unshaven—buried his head in the collar of his cloak and said never a word. Slowly passed the hours of their journey; each stopping-place was an agony of doubt and apprehension, each starting whistle a signal of relieve. This, too, came to an end.

Presently they stood on the quay at Southampton, and as Edward felt the first fresh full breeze from the sea he recovered for a moment the buoyancy of his spirits. It seemed the greeting of a new world, that sweet westerly breeze. The sniff of the brine, the splash of the waves, were hope and comfort to him. His father drew his cloak about him, shivered, and grumbled about the cold.

They went aboard the steamer as she lay by the quay, and stowed themselves and their baggage in the steerage. Nobody took any notice of them except a man who took their names and fares. By-and-by the steam began to throb hoarsely from the pipe, a bell rang, strangers went ashore; Markwood took his leave, and wrung Ned's hand without saying a word. When the paddles began to move, and the steamer moved into the middle of the stream, Edward felt as though danger were past. He saw his father stowed away below as comfortably as he could manage it, and then came up and loitered carelessly about the deck, watching the bustle of preparation, the tender coming off with the mails, shore-boats putting off with belated passengers. This was a German steamer, and there was already a considerable crowd of emigrants on board, and the people who came off from the shore were mostly cabin passengers; not business-like *habitués*, such as you meet on the Cunard boats, but people unused to long voyages apparently, curious and observant.

The tender brought a good load of passengers, and as the bell rang once more for all idlers to leave, the ascending stream was met by a current of people, who, not being for the voyage, were hurrying out of the ship, and a little confusion ensued. Edward drew near to the gangway, eagerly noting all who came on board, when among the last of the incoming procession he spied a couple of figures which seemed strangely familiar to him. The man had his felt hat pulled down over his brows, and his face was only partly visible. The woman, who seemed to be young and of an elegant figure, was closely veiled, so that her features were unrecognizable; but she wore a shawl—a warm black-and-white shawl, the sight of which gave Edward a thrill; for with a shawl like that were connected in his mind some of the sweetest, tenderest passages in his life. That shawl, or the exact counterpart of it, was Patty's.

Edward started forward to identify the couple if possible, but, entangled in the crowd, he could not reach them; they had disappeared in the cuddy. Edward watched at the hatchway, and presently the man reappeared, alone. He had not been mistaken—it was Bilfil. Who could be his companion?

A sudden pang of jealousy shot across his heart. Was it possible it could be Patty? Ned had seen Bilfil's letter to her, had laughed at it with her; but was it not possible that, in her girlish giddiness, she had been tempted by the prospect of the day's pleasure, and had come down for a trip to the Isle of Wight? And yet, surely a bright sharp girl like Patty could not be so deceived. The bare suspicion, however, was maddening; it must be set at rest, one way or the other. He ran forward, and seized Bilfil by the arm as he reached the deck. All the danger of being recognized, and most of all by Bilfil, seemed as nothing to him compared with the danger that menaced Patty.

"Who is the lady you have with you? I insist that you take me to her."

Bilfil threw him off. "What!" he cried, as soon as he recognized Edward Hulse. "Impu-

dent scoundrel! What! you are running away from the people you have robbed. Is there no policeman here to take this rogue into custody?"

It seemed hardly likely that this appeal should be answered; but so it was. One of the first to come on board from the tender had been Mr. Brass, the detective, with a Secretary of State's warrant for the apprehension of Edward Hulse in his pocket. Edward's arms were seized from behind; before he could recover himself a pair of handcuffs had been placed on his wrist.

"Not on your account, Mr. Bilfil," said Brass, touching his hat. "More serious thing than that, sir—willful murder."

"I'm not surprised," said Bilfil. "I have nothing to say to him, officer; unless, Mr. Hulse," he cried with mock politeness, "you have any message for Patty."

Edward, handcuffed as he was, made a dash at Bilfil; but he was quickly seized by the practiced hand of Brass, who managed him as easily as he might have done a trussed fowl. Before he knew where he was, he was hurried down the ship's side, and lying in the stern of a small boat that was bobbing up and down on the waves.

The great wheels of the steamship began to move, churning up the waters into huge cata-racts of foam; the master and the pilot, high above, guided her hither and thither with a wave of the hands; the boat seemed to dart away from the ship's side. All that Edward could see in that last look was a white head thrust over the taffrail rails, two hands vainly gesticulating to him, while on the poop the straw-colored Bilfil stood and watched the scene. It would make a forcible opening for his first contribution to the *Daily Mentor*.

CHAPTER XXI.

"O Lord, methought what torture 'twere to drown."

BILFIL, having thoroughly made up his mind that Patty should accompany him to America, had no scruples in devising the scheme which we have seen worked so successfully. If the girl would meet him to go to the Isle of Wight, it could do her no harm to go to America with him. When she saw the thing was inevitable, she would submit with a good grace. After all, it was a far better destiny for her than marrying a man in her own station in life, or that objectionable pauper, Hulse. It was all for her own good and his pleasure. He would settle something handsome upon her, so that she should be independent even of him. They would have a glorious time in America; would travel *en prince*. All that New York could furnish in the way of dress and trinkets should be at her disposal. For the immediate necessities of the voyage there was a very sufficient supply belonging to his wife: he called in the assistance of a female, had them packed up in two trunks, and forwarded them to Southampton. He then secured a state cabin for Mr. and Mrs. Bilfil, and awaited events.

All had gone well. Patty had been too much agitated to notice the difference between the Ryde packet and the American steamer; the awkward interruption threatened by the unexpected appearance of Edward Hulse had been suddenly and satisfactorily removed. Now it only remained to break the matter to the young lady—to acquaint her of his gracious intentions respecting her. He felt the matter to be a little awkward. It was a sudden, unprepared-for event; it might even be thought an outrage; but probably everything would go well. A girl like Patty would not have taken the step she had done in meeting him without having weighed the consequences.

Well, he would go down stairs and begin his explanation. She sat on a sofa in the cuddy; her veil was half raised, but he could not see her face, as her head was turned away from him. She held a book listlessly in her hand, but was not reading.

"Dear Patty," he said, softly, seating himself by her side.

She turned swiftly round upon him, raising

her veil and confronting him with flashing eyes. Bilfil recoiled in amazement and dismay. The woman was his wife.

"Yes, I have met you here," she said, sternly, "that we may make some arrangement together. I have sufficient proof of your character. I want to have nothing more to say to you; but I will not be robbed. Give me the money that is mine, the five hundred pounds that were paid into your hands when uncle died, and I will trouble you no more. Give me this money now, and when the boat reaches the island we will part forever."

Mrs. Bilfil was never sparing of voice or gesticulation. In her then mood she was defiant of the opinion of the world: all the world might know her grievances if it pleased. But Bilfil, cast down from the passionate ardor of illicit love to the humiliating level of a public encounter with his wife—Bilfil was keenly sensitive to public opinion. That he was ridiculous, disgraced in the eyes of his world, cut him to the very quick. But there was this help for him—his wife would keep her word. He would give her the five hundred pounds; he had never really meant to keep the money, only it hadn't been convenient to him to pay it on the moment. He had the money in his pocket in circular notes.

"You shall have your way," he said at last, "only be calm; don't make a disturbance. You don't seem to know that you are on the way to America."

"America!" cried Mrs. Bilfil, "and with you! Let me get out; I will stop the ship! where is the captain?"

"Heavens! don't make a fuss," cried Bilfil, "I will see if you can be put ashore."

The pilot was still on board; a yawl was bearing down fast upon the steamer to take him off. Yes, the lady could go ashore with the pilot, if she chose to forfeit her passage-money. There was no objection on the part of Mrs. Bilfil to go ashore in the pilot-boat. She was nervously anxious to get away from the ship at any price. She was presently lowered into the pilot-boat, and went off with her five hundred pounds.

As the yawl by degrees lessened to a mere speck on the horizon Bilfil gradually recovered his composure. After all, he had been saved some ugly qualms of conscience, of which he had just sufficient not to prevent him from doing a bad action, but to make him uncomfortable when he had done it. He had been, at all events, saved a great deal of trouble and expense. The afternoon was fine; the coast of Cornwall lay on their starboard quarter, a blue, ethereal sea-bank; the sea was calm and placid. Despite his annoyances, Bilfil began to feel the pleasant influences of the scene and time. He dined in the saloon at three, at six he partook of tea, at nine he had biscuits and brandy-and-water, and then he went on deck to smoke a last cigar before he turned in for the night.

On the sponson under the lee of the paddle-box Bilfil took his place, watching the undulating waters, the sparkling wake of the big ship. How would those tossing waves delight to swallow up his little life! how small he felt among their grandeur, how feeble in the midst of the great powers of Nature! Yes, on the whole Bilfil was glad that he had been disappointed in carrying off that girl. It would have been an ugly thing to have remembered; and now his memory was not charged with overmuch evil. And in the presence of the dark and lurid sea, whose breakers, tipped with flashing sparkles of light, seemed incessantly to pursue him, flinging up every now and then white foaming crests, which sometimes almost touched him as he stood, lathering and frothing among the wooden lattice-work at his feet, sinking into unknown depths of black and awful void—in the presence of the sad and solemn sea it were well to be free of much evil memory.

Supposing he fell forward into the sea, and, flung up for a moment on the crest of a wave, saw the lights of the cuddy glowing and twinkling over the dark billows, would that be a comfort to him, sinking there in the sea? would it be any use to him that human creatures were

there, full of life and hope, and he a castaway? What would be his thought in that supreme moment, which would surely be one of agony, when his body would circle down into the fathomless depths, when his tortured soul would quit its tenement of clay—where to abide? Would it flit upon the surface of the sea, following like a storm-bird the swiftly flying lights of the ship? or down among the tangled weeds and crunched shells, among the vast debris of these wild waves, imprisoned perhaps for countless ages in the gathering mass, that tiny force, that small but subtle essence, which would not stir the flame of a candle, which would not move the down on the softest breast of the daintiest bird of heaven, and yet which was indeed his all, his life, his soul? Where, then, would it speed? Thus he mused in loneliness among the waves of the sea, and thus sped the few remaining moments of his life.

Fleetwood Hulse, when he had seen his son torn away in the grasp of the officers of the law, wild with grief, with fury, had tried to fling himself over into the boat in which Edward was being carried away; but there were kindly arms to hold him back. The rough emigrants that were about him grieved with the poor old man whose son had been torn away from him, tried to soothe and comfort him; but he, bereft of everything—homeless, helpless, forlorn—could not be consoled, but only raved and tore his hair, and cried and blasphemed. The surgeon came to him, and had him tied up in a bunk; and then he grew quieter, and seemed to recover his lost wits; so that presently he was unbound, and joined a rough party at their tea. He was very quiet now and submissive, was sorry he had given so much trouble; he couldn't exactly remember what it was all about; but he was an old man, and had seen a deal of trouble. He was of good family, too; he wasn't what he appeared to be; when his friends knew who had been so kind to him, he trusted they would do something for them. In the meantime he was bound for America, where he hoped to meet his son. Not the son you have seen, not Edward, but John, who died out there, he thought; and when he came back he would have them all to dinner at Ebbsfleet.

And the people who were with him humored him and his fancies, so that after a while they got very merry together, and laughed a good deal; and old Hulse told them stories which had neither beginning nor end, but which were very funny for all that. But as the night drew on he became restless again; he said he must go and walk on the deck, and his friends followed him; but they lost sight of him all in a moment, and they never saw the old man again.

For he, wandering along up the deck, past the fore-cabins, past the engine hatches, came to the larboard paddle-box, and saw leaning there, placidly smoking and musing, the man who had ruined him, the man who had betrayed Edward, the man who had been the cause of their misery, the man Bilfil; and seized with an access of fury—blind, unreasoning fury—all the failing forces of his life gathering themselves up for one gulp of sweet revenge, old Fleetwood Hulse threw himself upon the man Bilfil, and seizing him round the waist, before he could utter a word or a cry, or make a motion of defense, he whirled him round and off his narrow standing-place, and uttering a loud cry, sprang with him into the sea.

The captain saw the men fall over, horror-struck; he saw them from his bridge; he could not help. Life-buoys were thrown over, the engines were stopped, a boat was presently lowered and pulled toward the spot where the men had disappeared; but it was useless, and everybody knew it would be useless; the two men had perished miserably long ago.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FLARE IN THE SKY

As the boat containing her lover and his fortunes disappeared among the river mists,

Patty, with her eyes full of tears, turned away from the wharf and went back to the house. Within, the close confined air seemed to choke her, all the more that she was desperately tired and oppressed with trouble and evil forebodings. The excitement she had felt in assisting Edward to get away had kept her up hitherto; now all of a sudden she gave way; she felt altogether lifeless and unstrung, a mere bundle of jarring fibres. The aspect of things about her, too, was strange and unfamiliar. She had been honored with the best bed-chamber. A gloomy catafalque of a bed, with faded moreen hangings, stood in one corner; old-fashioned rattling presses and chests of drawers cumbered up the room. The window looked out on the blank dull side of a warehouse.

Patty couldn't go to bed here; she felt the appearance of everything was repellent and uninviting. She took up a book and began to read, but the letters danced before her eyes; the words she read conveyed no meaning to her. Then she heard the door opposite hers—Lucy's bed-room—pushed open, and some one stole gently out and down the stairs. The front-door was quickly opened and shut; then the postern creaked and jarred on its hinges. Lucy had gone out! What could she be doing abroad so early as this? Perhaps she was merely taking a morning walk for the sake of fresh air—like Patty, she might be oppressed with the closeness and dullness of the house.

Lucy was out for about an hour. She came in as cautiously and quietly as she had gone out. The day was fully opened now, and sounds of life were frequent—the rattling of cars and wagons, the cries of itinerant traders. Patty had an intense desire to go home. She was hungering for a little sympathy and consolation; she wanted to have a good talk with her father. He would be home now from the office, and having his breakfast. It would be so comfortable to drop in upon them and share the meal. She couldn't stay here any longer, she felt, now that Edward was gone. Nobody cared for her here. Mrs. Hulse was kind, but cold and dignified, and Lucy—Lucy was hateful. Patty scrawled a little note to Mrs. Hulse, saying that she knew father wanted her at home, and she would go, now that she was of no farther use; but that she would come in the evening with Mr. Markwood, Edward's friend, and see if she could be of any service to them. That was carrying out the plans she had laid out with Ned. These arrangements Patty mentally recapitulated, in order that she might not forget anything she had to do. In the first place, when Markwood came back from Southampton, he was to call at Trinity Square for Patty. Then she was to tell him about the vault, and John Jones, who was a prisoner there, and they were to go together and release him. By that time Edward and his father would be beyond the reach of pursuit.

Next they had agreed that the best course would be to hire a couple of vans and clear the house that night of everything valuable in the way of furniture, and sell it to a broker. It would realize sixty or seventy pounds, and that would keep Mrs. Hulse and Lucy till they heard from America. As soon as Ned got a situation over there, he had told her that he would send for them all to join him—Patty as well, although in her own mind she had not half decided to go.

In the meantime there was a whole clear day before her to do as she pleased, and she let herself out of the postern door with a strange feeling of elation and recovered liberty. She ran all the way home, but after all she was not in time for breakfast. Her father had come home early this morning, and her mother was just clearing away the breakfast-things, very busy and cross.

"What, home already, Patty," she cried, in high-pitched, unamiable tones. "Couldn't you get on with your young man no better than that? You don't want your breakfast, I hope?"

"Indeed I do, mother."

"Then you must make do with that drop of cold coffee and a bit of bread. Why didn't

you get your breakfast with them? They ain't cheeked you, have they?"

"Oh, no, they've been very civil to me, mother, but I felt kind of homesick."

"Pish," cried Mrs. Robinson, "such nonsense! Why, Patty, I hope you haven't had no foolish tiff with Edward? You hold him fast, whatever you do, and keep your temper for such times as you have him booked all safe."

"Mother," said Patty, loftily, "do you think I'd make myself different from what I really am to deceive Edward, or that I'd hold him to me if he wanted to break away?"

"Well, your father and me would, anyhow," cried Mrs. Robinson. "I've no patience with such nonsense. Five hundred pounds his promise is worth to you at the very lowest, and more if it come to an action for breach—and you talking about letting him go!"

"Why, mother," cried Patty, with a touch of gratified spleen, "Edward's away to America this very morning. How will you get your five hundred pounds out of him there?"

"Gone to Ameriky!" screamed Mrs. Robinson, putting down the plate she was polishing with a crash among the rest of the crockery. "Gone to Ameriky, and you knew it—knew it, and never told me! Oh, you minx!"

She threw herself into a chair, and wrung her hands piteously.

"Why, what, good should I have done by telling you, mother?"

"Do you think I'd have let him go? Oh, you stupid! Not till he'd found bail, I wouldn't—sponsible bail as he'd come back again, or else give you your dues."

"But you couldn't have stopped him, mother," cried Patty, scornfully.

"Then I'd have gone with him. Yes, I'd have stuck to him like wax, as you may say, till he'd done you justice."

"But father wouldn't have liked you going off to sea with a young man."

"Father be bothered!" cried Mrs. Robinson: "much good he is, or you either. 'I've no patience with you, silly noodle-pipes! 'Oh, let him alone, mother,' says you; 'oh, don't bother him, mother; oh, he's a gentleman, and mustn't be spoken roughly to.' La, I'll speak to him if I get a chance."

"Don't go on so, mother," cried Patty. "Ned and I understand each other, and if we never marry, it won't be for want of the will."

Mrs. Robinson sighed a hopeless kind of sigh, as if it were no use reasoning with such a perverted intellect. Patty herself, although she spoke cheerfully enough, did not in her own heart feel any great hope of a satisfactory ending to her troubles. She acknowledged to herself that she had ventured her fortunes on a desperate undertaking. She would not go back now, but she could not help wishing for the moment that she had never seen the face of Edward Hulse. This thought, however, she quickly dismissed, and began to ponder over the work she had still to do. The image of the unhappy young man imprisoned in the underground vault rose continually in her mind; but, after all, his sufferings would be short, and he had only got what he richly deserved for having been so cruel and faithless to Lucy. What was her own share of responsibility in keeping him shut up she didn't know. She thought uneasily that she might be in some danger. They might put her in prison, perhaps. That would be very dreadful, but she would bear it all for Ned's sake.

In the meantime, as no action could be taken till Markwood appeared, the best thing she could do was to take as much rest as possible. She was worn out with fatigue and excitement, and no sooner reached her own room and laid herself down than, soothed by the familiar aspect of her surroundings, she fell into a profound slumber. She roused herself at one o'clock for dinner, and then went to sleep again on the sofa in the drawing-room, and she slept till it was almost dark; and then was aroused by a great bustle in the room, and found that Mrs. Bilfil had just returned, accompanied by Markwood, and had surprised her in her slumbers.

Margaret was in the highest spirits, laughing and talking vehemently. Markwood had met her at the station at Southampton, and had escorted her home. The possession of her little capital, five hundred pounds in crisp notes, in her pocket, had quite transformed her. She had spent a little of it already, having bought herself a handsome scarf, and a pair of gold ear-rings for Patty. She wouldn't hear of Patty's leaving the sofa, but ensconced herself comfortably in the easy-chair opposite, and made Markwood take a seat beside her.

"It has been a most exciting day," said Margaret, "but everything has gone off so well! Markwood has just told me about poor Edward. I had no idea that such a thing was possible, but I am so glad he has got safely away, for I feel sure that it was on my account that he was persecuted. But to think of his being so foolish as to put himself in Bilfil's power!"

"You haven't heard half the story yet," said Patty, stiffly; "when you know all you'll have a very different opinion of Edward. And now, Mr. Markwood, I want you to go with me to Ebbsfleet."

"Certainly," said Markwood, with the slightest show of reluctance. He was tired, and felt himself exceedingly comfortable, and was quite charmed by the society of Mrs. Bilfil.

"I think I will go with you. I haven't seen the Fleetwood Hulses for I don't know how long, and now that they are in trouble—And perhaps," cried Margaret, with new-born dignity, "I may be of use to them."

"Then we'll all go," said Markwood, gayly, getting up and walking to the window; "the night is fine. Hallo!" he cried, in an excited way, "what a terrific glow in the sky over yonder—tongues of flame too, and showers of sparks. Why, there is a tremendous fire somewhere; and, by Heaven, it's just in the direction of Ebbsfleet!"

Patty sprang to her feet in an agony of fear. "Let us go this instant; come, run!" she cried. "Oh, what horror, if it should be Ebbsfleet!" She thought in terror of the young man immured in the vault—of the locked-up warehouse, the key of which was in her own pocket.

"Calm yourself, my dear," cried Markwood; "there is no danger to life; there can be no danger, even if it should be Ebbsfleet—and it may be fifty other places—all living souls would be rescued. It's not like a fire in the dead of night, when everybody is in bed and asleep."

"You don't know," cried Patty; "you don't know who is in danger—come run! nobody knows. Oh, we shall be too late!"

They all hurried out. The air was lurid, the sky of a fiery red toward the river, of an inky black elsewhere. A great confused roar sounded in the air.

"Whereaway is the fire?" shouted Markwood to a passing policeman.

"Along the river-side; dwelling-house and warehouse—place called Ebbsfleet."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Sorrow breaks seasons and reposing hours,
Makes the night morning, and the noontide night."

PATTY ROBINSON had not been mistaken. It was in truth Lucy who had gone out so early that morning, and her destination was Fenton's Hotel, where Sir Pantlin and the archdeacon were staying. The place had been wrapped in deep slumber when she reached it; the earliest chamber-maid had not begun to stir, Boots was immersed in sleep, the night porter had gone home to bed, and as yet none of the myrmidons of day had made their appearance. Lucy was perplexed and terrified at this obstacle. How could she wake this sleeping house, and rouse their dull and unsympathetic souls to hear her story?

As she stood with her hand on the bell that was marked "Night bell," half frightened and half resolved, the door opened, and a tall man in black came out. With vacant dreamy eyes and head bowed down between his shoulders,

he passed by Lucy without taking any notice of her, and walked slowly away. It was the archdeacon, John's father, going out for his accustomed morning walk, that all this toil and trouble hadn't put him off from. Lucy ran after him and stopped him. When he recognized her, a puzzled, pained expression came across his face.

"I have something to tell you," began Lucy, "that you must hear. I don't know whether I am right or wrong, but I can do no other—I must speak. Your son came to our place that night, and he never left it. And Edward knows where he is, and he is gone—run away!"

"Who, John?" cried the archdeacon, his face brightening up. "Is that really so—is the boy safe?"

Lucy shook her head.

"No, I don't mean that. Edward has run away—that looks like guilt. Oh, what shall I do?"

"My dear child," said the archdeacon, coming to a full stop in the middle of the road, "this is very sad. Do you mean to say that you suspect your brother—your own brother?"

"I do. I'm wretched, miserable; but I can't help knowing that he must be guilty."

"And you come to give evidence against him—you, his sister! Is this right? Can I take any notice of what you say? God knows that I would give all I have to know the truth, even were it the very worst that we fear—but from you!"

"That is, you think yourself so much nearer to John than I; but I don't think so. John is more to me than anybody, brother or father or anyone."

The archdeacon looked perplexed and distressed. "Fas est ab hoste doceri," he muttered to himself; "and yet—Well, I will leave it to Sir Pantlin, if he thinks it is right. Come to the hotel with me, and I will consult a friend."

He led the way back to the hotel. As they reached the steps they saw Mr. Brass, the detective, coming swiftly along toward the house. His face was clouded with a certain amount of discontent, but it brightened up as he saw who it was with the archdeacon.

"Morning, sir!" he cried. "I'm glad to see you looking so well, sir. The young gent and the old one was off betimes this morning, or else I should have liked to have spoken to 'em. But seeing you, miss, will do as well. Perhaps you'll tell me where a telegraph message will find 'em."

"Shall I tell him?" whispered Lucy, to the archdeacon.

"I suppose you ought," he said. "Yes, indeed, I think so."

"He is gone to Southampton," said Lucy, slowly, "on his way to America. I know that he killed John, because I have seen the marks of his blood. I have a glove, too, that was his; but I will tell you all that when the time comes for me to speak."

"Thank you, miss," said Brass, looking at her in a quiet, reflective way. "That's what I call doing the noble Roman. There ain't many, miss, like you. One half minute, miss, if you please."

Brass took out his note-book and adroitly made himself master of all that Lucy knew with respect to her lover's disappearance. After this Lucy went home like one in a dream. What had she done? There were not many like her, the man had told her. Was there in the whole world a girl so wicked and miserable as she? And yet as the day went on everything at home seemed quiet and tranquil. Her mother was busy about household matters. The men came to their work. The boats loaded and unloaded. There was no outward sign of the tragedy that was working in their lives.

The day dragged itself to an end at last. Nothing whatever had transpired; there was no news of fugitives or police, of John's relations or of anything. A man walked to and fro in front of the entrance, and his slow methodic footstep had been beating into Lucy's brain all day. But there was nothing else different at Ebbsfleet, except a wonderful quietude and stillness. As night came on, Lucy thought she

would go and visit the old warehouse. But the key was missing. It was nowhere to be found. In her heart she was glad that she could not get into the place. The thought of that dismal blood-stained room struck her with horror, and yet she felt constrained to go and visit it. It was well that she had not the power to go.

Soon after nine o'clock Lucy went to her own room to bed. She hoped to find a little respite in sleep from the troubles that oppressed her. She did not undress, however, but, slipping off her dress, threw over her shoulders a loose wrapper, and lay down on the bed. She could not sleep. To close her eyes seemed to be to invite all kinds of uncanny, dismal thoughts to run riot in her brain. The stillness, and quietude, and darkness soothed her, however, into a sort of lethargy. She was aroused ere long by a curious muffled sound that seemed to proceed from the bowels of the earth. What it was she could not for a long time make out. At last it resolved itself into this—the baying and howling of a dog.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

THE Reverend John Jones, left once more to silence and solitude, began to feel languor and somnolence creeping over him, with a sense of hopelessness and indifference to whatever might befall. His head ached, his brow burned, his throat was parched; he was altogether ill and miserable. True, that his situation was not so deplorable as it had been before his enemy had visited him. He had no longer any fear of personal violence. He was well provided with food and drink. He had a paillasse and some blankets to repose upon. The vault in which he was confined was dry and cool. Young Hulse, with strange thoughtfulness, had even brought him a newspaper to read, as well as a supply of candles. It was in John's nature to take an easy, hopeful view of matters, and accommodate himself to circumstances, and this disposition reasserted itself after the first moment of depression. He adjusted his candle carefully, laid himself down on his mattress, with a bumper of sherry-and-water by his side, and composed himself comfortably to read himself to sleep.

The newspaper contained an account of his own mysterious disappearance. That amused and interested him. He felt rather flattered that he was the subject of such interest and speculation. But he was very weary and tired, and presently fell fast asleep. When he awoke he felt rested and refreshed. His head was better, and he was altogether stronger and more capable. He had no means of telling the time or reckoning the hours of his captivity, but it was not so completely dark as it had been. There was some communication with the outward air, probably through the vaulted roof, and a faint glimmer of daylight somehow filtered through.

With renewed strength, however, came a strong desire for liberty, and impatience of his captivity—a longing for his own comfortable room, his bath and toilette requisites—a feeling of dirt and grousiness.

To dissipate these thoughts, the curate of St. Saveall's took up the candle and began to explore his cavern. It was not without some antiquarian interest. Round pilasters with rudely sculptured capitals supported ribs of stone that formed a plain barrel vaulting overhead. It had been a chapel once upon a time, perhaps. There were even traces, he thought, of an altar-stone at the farther end of the crypt, which had been broken away; the remains of a rude piscina—a hollow basin for the rinsings of the sacred vessels—was on the right-hand wall. Perhaps there might be an almonry or cupboard for the reception of the altar plate on the other side? At first sight it seemed as though there were nothing of the kind, but, looking closely, John perceived that there was a slight depression in the wall where such a thing was likely to be found, and tapping this with his fingers, it gave back a ringing sound. There was an iron plate

here evidently, and some receptacle behind, but he could see no means of opening it. There was no knob or depression of which he could take advantage; the plate of iron was firm, and almost flush with the wall. As he stooped down with the candle in his hand to examine the lower courses of the masonry, he struck his foot against something that jingled, and behold! it was a bunch of keys, rusted all over—modern keys of a common pattern, all but one, which was long, with a narrow barrel and curiously shaped wards.

Was there any key-hole to this iron plate? There was none apparent, but careful research revealed one that closed with a spring. The long key evidently had once fitted this hole, but now it was rusted so much that it could not be inserted. John took up some gravel from the floor and polished the key carefully; with a pin he cleared the barrel from accumulated dust. After a while he succeeded in getting the key into the lock. With an effort he opened the lock, and the door swung forward. This secret repository was in truth a neat little iron safe that had been fitted in the recess—a safe with drawers and another small locked iron door within it.

John eagerly opened the drawers. They were all empty. Then he found on the bunch of keys the one that fitted the little door, and he opened it. There was a bundle of papers within, and an old battered volume in a limp leathern cover. Altogether this was interesting, and John, after satisfying himself that there was nothing else contained in the safe, took back his prize to his couch, and proceeded to examine it.

The papers seemed to be a list of securities, of which he could make nothing. The old leather-covered volume contained nothing of interest. It seemed to be a sort of day-book, or the rough record of transactions of a financial sort. There were jottings here and there that might have thrown some light upon the identity of the former owner; but all doubt as to this was removed by the title-page, which bore the inscription, "Gilbert Paston, his book," and the rude doggerel, "Gilbert is my name, England is my nation, New Romney is my dwelling-place, And Christ is my salvation!" It had been an old school ciphering-book, no doubt, which its penurious owner had subsequently utilized for business transactions. It had nothing in it to excite the attention of its reader, who was about to throw the book carelessly on one side, when he espied a folded paper inserted between the last page and the binding.

The handwriting was crabbed and indistinct, tremulous as though the writer had been half-palsied when he wrote it. Jones, however, had little trouble in deciphering it.

"I have been troubled of late" (so ran the manuscript) "with the thought that I have done some injustice to the Hulse family. When I was a struggling young man, Fleetwood Hulse lent me five hundred pounds, which saved my credit and set me firmly on my legs. It was a foolish thing for him to do, for I had no security to offer him; and had matters taken a different turn, he would never have been repaid. I did repay him, and with good interest, so I can charge my conscience with nothing owing to him. I should be sorry to trust any money of mine in the hands of such a foolish, proud fellow, who has no notion of the proper use of money. I have been led to think about this from the fact that Fleetwood has this day asked me to advance him a similar sum to that he lent me. I could not do it; my principles would not allow me. I could never meet my Maker with a clear conscience if I made so foolish a use of the talents with which He has intrusted me. Yet I felt a certain remorse and sorrow that I was obliged to refuse him; and it has struck me that I can, without detriment to the useful objects to which I have devoted my poor savings, do something for the children of my wrong-headed, unfortunate friend. Finding that his two children, Lucy and Edward, have been well brought up, and are likely to make a good use of anything they may acquire, I have re-

solved to frame a codicil to my will. As life is uncertain—and I have had sundry warnings that in my case it is especially so—I shall give effect to my intentions on the opposite side of this sheet, and when I return home I shall instruct my lawyer to prepare a properly drawn instrument.

(Signed) GILBERT PASTON."

On the opposite side of the sheet was hastily scrawled:

"*Ebbfleet, 28th June, 18—*. I hereby revoke such part of the bequests contained in my will of the 9th October as relates to the sum of forty-two thousand nine hundred and thirty-five pounds eight shillings and eleven pence Consolidated Three-per-cent. Annuities; and I give and bequeath the same in equal moieties to Edward and Lucy Hulse, their heirs and assigns.

"GILBERT PASTON

"Witnesses, { JOB STIMSON,
LUKE PLUMMER."

John Jones rubbed his eyes in astonishment. There was an air of genuineness about this document that at once carried conviction to his mind. This will, or codicil, was dated just before Paston's death—of the circumstances of which, and of their disappointment at not being remembered in the will, the Hulses had often talked in his presence. The wealth of old Paston was notorious; and were this codicil produced, there would be no difficulty in at once obtaining the bequest, for the estate had been so large and scattered that the affairs were not even yet wound up. Probably these papers, too, would reveal unsuspecting investments and unthought-of deposits, and would assist greatly in the realization of the estate.

What a wonderfully different light this old scrap of paper threw upon matters! Why, here was he, John Jones, actually flinging away a charming girl and a living much better than that of Pumptrisant, inasmuch as the income was larger and the duties far more agreeable—flinging it away, without knowing what he was doing! How that stupid affair of the bill for three hundred pounds faded into insignificance now! No doubt he had given old Hulse to understand that he might use his name for some such trifling amount. He mustn't do it again, though. It was high time that Lucy had some responsible disinterested guardian for her wealth.

In the meantime, how fortunate it was that he had said nothing to Lucy as to his proposed desertion of her! What he had spoken to Edward was in the heat of passion, and went for nothing. How fortunate, too, that he hadn't delivered that letter, which he had written with the intention of leaving at the house in case he should find his courage not high enough to break off with her in person! It was still in his pocket, no doubt. No, he couldn't find it there; he might have left it at his lodgings; he was so agitated that night that he might very well have forgotten to put it in his pocket.

Now everything would go on as merrily as marriage bells. He would treat the whole matter connected with his disappearance as a foolish freak concocted between himself and Ned Hulse. Naturally Edward would be glad enough that this view should be taken; it would be a nine days' wonder—that was all. Lucy would remain, at the end of it—Lucy charming, faithful—the mistress of twenty thousand pounds. Likely enough Sir Pantlin would still object; but he didn't care a fig for Sir Pantlin now, or for Pumptrisant either. Why should he bury himself among a lot of Welsh hovels for a paltry four hundred a year?

Oh, if he could only make Ned hear, and tell him it was all right—that he had come to his senses, and would forgive and forget everything that had passed! The will could be discovered accidentally later on.

He cried out, in his jolliest, airiest tones, "Ned, Ned!" but the walls returned him only the ring of his own voice. Then he essayed to pass into the outer crypt, but the door was fastened. He rattled and kicked at the door; a low growl, like a lion's smothered roar, was the

response. He remembered that the old blind dog was also his guardian. Well, he must have patience; somebody would come by-and-by to release him.

He dozed and slumbered away the day, and still no one came. A certain chill and deadness of the air told him that it was now night. Another night to pass within this sepulchre; it was horrible to think of. Cut off from all the living world, immured in this dungeon, his whereabouts known only to two persons determined to keep him concealed. Had they deserted him, and made their escape without revealing the secret of his imprisonment? If so, he was buried alive. He would die here a lingering death—a death of slow starvation. And yet, as he thought of it, there could be no such imminent danger. Even if it were impossible for him to make himself heard, the dog in the adjoining chamber would not submit quietly to starvation; it would soon begin to bark and howl, and would draw attention to their hiding-place.

Even now he heard a prolonged howl from the dog outside. It was a melancholy, dismal sound, and sent a thrill of nervous fear through the curate's frame. That was not the only sound that broke upon the stillness of the night. A dull confused roar, as of surf breaking upon a shore, or the wind among the branches of a pine forest—a noise that waxed and waned in gusts, but that seemed to gather strength and volume each moment. The air, too, grew hot and mephitic; nay, from the crevices of the door puffs of thin vapor penetrated the crypt. Louder and louder rose the howl of the dog, in dismal foreboding complaint.

For a moment John dashed furiously round his cell, striking his head against the walls, tearing at the cruel, indifferent stones with his fingers. The warehouse was on fire, and he was doomed to the most horrible of deaths. Then, as he realized the utter hopelessness of any exertion on his part, he sank on his mattress in a state of semi-stupor. He was doomed to die. With all the possibilities of future happiness and joy within his very grasp, he was devoted to a torturing death by fire.

The heat grew fiercer, the eddies of smoke more thick and choking. The dog was now furiously barking, driven half mad by the smoke and heat. Surely the end was very near at hand.

CHAPTER XXV.

CAPTIVITY.

Now that he had effected his *coup* and secured his prisoner, Mr. Brass did not feel called upon to hurry himself. He liked to improve his mind whenever occasion offered, and to extend his knowledge of men and things. Intrusting his prisoner, therefore, and the precious wooden box with the tin lining to the care of the young man who accompanied him—a member of the force, who was gaining experience in his business under the tutelage of the accomplished Brass—he devoted his morning to an examination of the quays and docks of Southampton, and an investigation of the passenger arrangements of the several great steam-packet companies that have their headquarters at that port. These he scrutinized with the warm intelligent interest that a cat of poaching propensities might feel with regard to a well-used rabbit-run.

To Edward Hulse this delay was the one thing that redeemed him from utter despair. His father was speeding fast out of danger, and every hour gave ampler hope of ultimate escape. Now that the worst had come, he felt almost indifferent to the perils of his own position. He had only to speak, he had only to reveal the hiding-place of his supposed victim, and the charge against him must come to an end; as for any ulterior proceedings, he didn't much fear them. He was nevertheless resolved to say nothing whatever till twenty-four hours had elapsed from the sailing of the steamer. The moment that John Jones was released the matter of the forgery would come out, and measures

might be taken to secure the culprit. As the curate's friends were influential and wealthy, extraordinary measures might be taken to stop his flight. A steamer might be dispatched to overtake the other, or an experienced detective sent to track him out in America.

When his thoughts wandered from his father's affairs to his own, he was overcome with a bitter sense of degradation and defeat. That Bilfil had succeeded in some villainous way in enticing Patty on board the steamer, Edward had no doubt; he couldn't disbelieve the evidence of his own senses; he could have sworn to that shawl anywhere. Not that he could at first believe that Patty was altogether faithless—that she had gone straight from his arms to the protection of Mr. Bilfil; but there was a horrible doubt in his mind. There were women capable of such profound baseness; why not this one? Had she not possibly even betrayed him to the police? How else should they have traced him so quickly and successfully?

Then, again, if Patty were really away by the American steamer, innocent or guilty, her reputation was hopelessly gone. How could he ever make a woman his wife about whom such a story could be told, and could not be denied?

To complicate and complete his trouble came also this reflection—Patty gone, no matter how or why, the only person who knew of John's place of concealment was removed. She had the key of the warehouse—the key too of the inner crypt. Suppose that when he came to tell his tale nobody would believe him, and that John were left there to starve? Weakened as he was, he might even succumb to the miseries of his imprisonment before the twenty-four hours had elapsed, and then indeed his enemy's blood would be upon his head.

Be that as it might, he was firmly resolved to say nothing till the morning, but still to preserve a discreet, determined silence. Morning might bring some solution of his perplexities, he knew not how or whence.

It was quite dark before Mr. Brass and his prisoner reached Waterloo Station on their return journey. As Hulce had been arrested on a Secretary of State's warrant, his destination was Newgate; and for a moment the prisoner's heart sank as he realized what it was to be immured within that somber prison, darkened by the memories of so much crime and misery. The cab in which they were conveyed took its way among gloomy silent back streets of Southwark, and so over Blackfriars Bridge. As they crossed the river the cab all of a sudden came to a stand, as there burst upon them a sight at once grand and appalling. A great sheet of flame was springing upward to the sky, the river was aglow with fire, every ripple like a wave of molten brass. Spires, tall warehouses, boats, masts, and tangled rigging, white faces of men all turned one way, sprang out into sudden distinctness. Everything seemed to stand still for a moment and to be silent in the face of this torrent of flame, and then to burst forth again into mad energy and uproar.

"Be quiet, can't you?" cried Brass to his companion, who instinctively struggled to open the door and jump out. "None of your larks with me, or I'll give you one across the head."

"Oh, let me go," cried Edward; "the fire is close by home."

"Your home's Newgate, my fine fellow, for yet a while. They'll have to do without us at the fire, wherever it may be."

"It is Ebbsfleet that is on fire!" cried Edward; "I can see the flames bursting from the balcony. Oh, for the love of God, Mr. Brass, take me there! There is a man concealed there who will be burned alive!"

"My warrant says Newgate; and to Newgate you go."

Edward's cries and protestations were useless. Mr. Brass quitted not his hold of him till he had handed him safely over into the custody of the governor of Newgate, and there in a solitary cell he was left to the poignant anxiety, remorse, and uncertainty caused by his knowledge of this catastrophe, and his apprehension of the results that might ensue from it.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LIGHT BENEATH THE DOOR.

THE baying of the dog still continued, a sepulchral, muffled sound, as though it came from the bowels of the earth. Lucy sat up eagerly in bed and listened. Then she bethought of the old dog in the warehouse. She had forgotten all about him till that moment. Poor old Scipio! Since Edward had gone there had been nobody to look after him. Lucy was not fond of animals, but she was kind to them. It wasn't right, she said to herself, that the dog should suffer for their faults. But it was hardly likely that she would be able to get to him. The warehouse was locked, and some one had carried off the keys. Was there no way of getting inside?

Lucy remembered that in the old days they used as children—her brother Ned and herself—to climb across a narrow ledge that ran just above high-water mark along the river face of the warehouse. Thence it was easy enough to clamber into the warehouse through an old broken window, which was never fastened. The way was easy enough to any one who knew it; and Lucy was in a mood that made a little danger acceptable to her. She went down-stairs and found some biscuits, filled a pitcher with water, and took down a lamp and lit it. Then she went out into the yard and looked about her and listened. She could still hear the barking, a faint muffled sound that seemed to come from a far distance.

Lucy stepped lightly along the narrow ledge that ran along the basement of the warehouse. There

was a strange light over her head, but she could not see what it meant. When she reached the window through which she had intended to make her way to the warehouse, she found it had been lately repaired and was now fastened. It was almost impossible to turn back on the narrow slippery ledge; the window-frame afforded her something to hold on by, but a sudden dizziness and fear took possession of her. She looked down into the hurrying waters below her that were lapping fiercely among the piles, and the sight took away the little courage that was left her. In desperation she swung the heavy bag of biscuits against the newly mended window and broke it in; thrusting her hand among the jagged pieces of broken glass, she shot back the bolt, threw open the casement, and found her way inside.

Within, the air was hot and stifling, and she was almost overpowered by the mephitic vapors that met her. From the farther end of the long low room came a dull red glow; it was from Edward's workshop. Then Lucy bethought her of the charcoal brazier and soldering-pot that she had seen when she was last there. This pan of charcoal no doubt had been upset, and its contents had smouldered and set alight the shavings and sawdust with which the place was littered. For a moment she hoped that she might reach the seat of the fire and perhaps extinguish it before it gathered head; but with the opening of the window came a vast indraught of air that fanned the smouldering mass into a glow. Then Lucy turned to make her escape; but at that moment she heard the deep bay of the dog, with a wail of piteous entreaty in it. The sound seemed to come from below, from beneath her very feet.

There was yet time to save the poor dog from the fate that menaced him, if she could only find out where he was. Yes, he must be in the vaulted chamber below, old Paston's den, which Edward and she discovered together. The trap door that led into the vault was close at hand. With a great effort she raised it, and the bark and the howl of the dog now rang out clear and distinct. The ladder was in its place, and Lucy hurried down to the archway and pushed open the outer door, which was unlocked, and swung open easily enough.

"Come, Scipio—come, old dog!" she cried. The dog recognized her voice, and ceased his barking, whined and wagged his tail, but would not move from his station at the threshold of the inner portal. "Perhaps he is chained," said Lucy, balancing in her mind for a moment whether she would turn and save herself or try once more to save the dog. She would make another effort. She placed her lamp upon the floor while she went to Scipio to examine his collar, and unloose him if he were chained. In turning round, her draperies swept against the lamp and overturned it, the light went out with a sputter and fizz, and she was left in darkness.

She was about to turn and run for her life, when, to her amazement and terror, she saw shining underneath the inner door a line of bright light. As the dog ceased his noise the door beneath began to jar and rattle. Some one was shaking it. A voice was crying, "Help! help!" Whose voice? Great Heaven, it was John's! And the door was massive and strong, locked with a secure lock.

Smoke was pouring down from above, hot, stifling vapors were filling up the vault.

Lucy threw herself down upon the floor. She put her lips to the crevice of the door, where the light shone between the door and the threshold.

"John," she cried, "is it you, darling? Are you really John?"

"Yes, I am John. Lucy, open the door quick, quick; I am stifling!"

"I cannot," she cried; "it is fast locked, and I have not the key."

CHAPTER XXVII.

FIRE AND WATER.

A GREAT fire in the city! The sky of crimson flecked with flakes of yellow flame; a huge cloud of smoke hanging like a pall in mid air. A hum and roar and indescribable turmoil and confusion everywhere widening and spreading in concentric waves. Travelers coming in to-night by rail over viaducts and endless embankments stare wonderfully at the vortex of fire into which they are being hurried, as if all of a sudden the gates of pandemonium were opened upon them. Far down the river, mariners and seamen, and the boatmen who haunt the shores, catch sight of the wondrous glow shining redly over marshes and reaches, and tinging the white sails with its Tyrian hue. Far away, clerks at supper in their snug abodes in Brixton and Camberwell see the crimson flare in the sky, and straightway, taking guidance from the flames, hurry cityward, quaking for their stools and ledgers. All the floating wreck and lumber of London, the great army of loafers, cadgers, thieves, takes marching order, and pours its masses upon that nucleus of fire. Away among the Surrey hills and round about Middlesex, from Staines to Tottenham—wherever the chiefs of commerce fare sumptuously among hanging gardens, fairy lawns, and luxuriant shrubberies—the fiery cross rears itself above inclosing trees, and strikes a chilly doubt to the heart of many a city Cæsar.

A great fire in the city! In the very heart of its warehouses and docks and storehouses rich with the gathered wealth of the universal globe. What possibilities of ruin and disaster, of frightful waste and profitless destruction, lie within these simple words! That shower of sparks is all the outcome of summer's toil and winter's thrift to a whole community of husbandmen. For that flickering tongue of flame a hundred ships have plowed the seas, a thousand seamen toiled at sail and rope, and braved the dangers of the deep, to find the fuel. The huge roll of smoke slashed with puffs of rich scarlet flame

consumes the wealth of the richest trader of the city. No life lost, you say? The end and aim of half a hundred lives went up to heaven in that one fiery gust.

The fire that raged that night in the city had its origin at Ebbsfleet Wharf. A huge dry-salter's warehouse abutted on the wharf, crammed almost to bursting with combustible stores, that had caught the flames at once; and now, right along the river front, the buildings were crackling to destruction. All round the line of devoted buildings—among narrow passages leading nowhere, narrow courts and streets where tall warehouses shut out all but the narrowest strip of sky—crowds of curious spectators converged upon the fire, against whom the police, deployed here and there along the line, maintained an intermittent, futile resistance. Long lines of snake-like hose meandered here and there along the gutters, little jets of water spouting from their seams, and turning the lanes into sloppy rivulets. Ever and again, with a great clash and roar, some belated engine would cleave a passage through the shrinking crowd; while from out of the glowing nucleus of fire came the roar of flames, the intermittent heat of the engines, and the crackling hiss of streams of water, that seemed like the squirting of toys against that huge incandescent mass. In the middle of it all flits the ubiquitous penny-a-liner, with his coat pockets crammed with note-paper, snatching information from one and another policeman, pot-man, fireman, or casual loafer, and straightway converting it into profitable "copy."

Markwood, with Patty and Margaret Bilfil on his arms, hurried away from Tower Hill toward the fire; Patty eagerly pouring into his ears the story about John Jones, and the reason there was for keeping him locked up in the vault, and of the imminent danger there was that he would be destroyed in the fire, if it were really raging there.

"And then," said Patty, breathlessly, "what chance would there be for Ned? They would find the body, and brand him as a murderer, and hunt him down wherever he might go. And I have the keys," cried Patty, holding up the large key of the warehouse, and the other one of the inner vault; "and no one can get to him, or know anything about him!"

It was not till then that Markwood realized that the story she had told him was a true one. But the sight of the keys convinced him, and he hurried on faster and faster. The fire was spreading rapidly and throwing a glare like the light of day over everything. They were soon challenged by a picket of police, who told them they could not advance any farther.

"It's a matter of life and death!" cried Markwood. "Take me instantly to the chief of the fire brigade."

"We don't know where he is," said the policeman; "but pass on, and look for him yourself."

Markwood left his companions under the care of the police and pushed on.

After sundry rebuffs and mistakes, and running into imminent peril from falling walls and jets of fire, he found out the captain of the brigade, and told him how that a human life was in danger, and volunteered to lead a forlorn hope to search the burning warehouse. The captain listened impatiently to the story.

"If there's anybody left in Ebbsfleet," he cried, "he's a cinder. The place is gutted, and nothing left but red hot bricks; and I'll not allow any of my men to risk their lives on such a wild-goose attempt."

Markwood found out Patty, with grave, pale face.

"It's all over," he said; "there's no hope!"

"Then it's all over with Ned, too," she cried, "and with me—we are both of us murderers!"

"Stop!" cried Markwood, "there is one chance yet; there is an inlet that runs under the old warehouse; it opens on the river; it must be there, that the vault you tell me of is placed. I will get a boat and row about in front of the place."

Markwood knew the neighborhood perfectly, and in a few moments brought them to a narrow stair leading down to the river, at the foot of which were moored a couple of wherries.

"I shall take French leave!" cried Markwood, as he cast off the painter, and took the sculls in his hands. The two girls followed him into the boat, and presently they were afloat on the glowing stream.

The sight from the river was grand and awful. A whole row of warehouses was on fire. The dry-salter's store next to Ebbsfleet was blazing and flaring in fierce, many-colored flames. Sundry barrels of oil had burst, and their blazing contents had run off into the river, covering the surface of the stream with a film of liquid fire; flaming rafters and showers of melted glass and boiling lead were falling hissing into the waters. It was Phlegethon—the lake of burning fire—it seemed all blood, the ripples of it darts of flame; the low-lying shore opposite; the black, gloomy buildings; the white bridges standing out in ghostly distinctness, their lamps shining pale and yellow in the glare, the tangled tracery of mast and spar and sheet and shroud; the floating craft that darted to and fro, freighted with dark, melancholy shadows—formed a picture of weird and striking power and grandeur.

Patty covered her eyes with her hands as the boat shot forth into the full glare of the conflagration. There was no chance for a poor human being in all this whirlpool of fire.

"Can you row?" said Markwood to Patty, as she sat gazing horror-struck at the lurid spectacle.

"Yes," she said, with a start; "why do you ask?"

"Take these sculls," he said, "and paddle gently about; don't lose sight of that skeleton balcony, where the flames are bursting out, that the stream of water is playing upon."

Markwood had taken off his coat and waistcoat,

folding them carefully up, and now kicked off his shoes, placing them upon one of the thwarts.

"What are you going to do?" cried Margaret.

"Only for a dive," said Markwood. "I'll see if there's anybody alive in Ebbsfleet."

"Don't risk your life," cried Margaret. "Why should you throw it away for nothing?"

"Give me that key, Miss Robinson," cried Markwood. "You're sure there's no mistake about the vault opening out of the channel?"

"There's no mistake; but it's too late now."

"I know the spot exactly," mused Markwood, "where the channel flows into the river, just under that flaming balcony. The warehouse is strongly built in that corner, and it looks as if it had resisted the fire so far. I'll try!"

So saying, Markwood stepped into the stern of the boat, and gathered himself together for a dive. He was an excellent swimmer and diver—accomplishments rare among Englishmen, who, shut in by cold and stormy seas, rarely acquire any great skill or confidence in the water.

But Markwood's father had been a storekeeper in Malta, and he had spent his boyhood there, and had acquired, in the warm and sunny Mediterranean, a real love of and pleasure in an amphibious life. To him, therefore, the enterprise was not so hopeless as it might have been to a feeble swimmer; still it was fraught with much peril. Merely for the chance of saving a stranger's life, he wouldn't have risked it. But so much hung upon that life. If the body of John Jones were discovered after the fire, as it surely would be, half calveined in the underground vault, there would be little chance of Edward Hulse escaping arraignment and conviction for his murder. He would be pursued to America, and brought back without doubt.

"Don't go," cried Margaret, beseechingly; "don't throw away your life."

Markwood smiled benignly at her. A sullen splash in the water—he had disappeared. Patty, the oars in her hands lightly paddling against the stream, watched the glowing waters with anxious eyes.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A LION IN THE PATH.

The key was lying on the floor all the time—the duplicate key; Gilbert Paston had dropped the two keys on his sudden seizure, eighteen months ago and more. One had been found by the Hulses, the other had lain there unnoticed ever since. It might still be lying there had not Lucy, in the gleam of light from under the door, seen the key and seized it.

To unlock the door was only the work of a moment.

"Oh, John! dear John!" cried Lucy, when she saw her lover stand before her, pale, haggard, and unkempt. "Are you really alive?" She put her hands upon him timidly, as if she half-expected them to encounter some impalpable essence. John seized her hands, and gave her a hearty kiss. "And you are not false to me, as they said you were, John?"

"No, I am true to you still, Lucy; it was all a mistake."

"Then I am happy now, John; and if we die, we will die together."

"But we won't die yet, Lucy. Can't we get out of this place?"

"We will try; but the flames have spread awfully in the last moment. We are surrounded by fire; but we may still reach the window that overlooks the river. Come!"

Lucy led the way toward the opening, and John essayed to follow, but there was a lion in the path. The blind dog, Scipio, stood in the way, rigid and stiff, with coat erect, and sightless eyes glowing like coals of fire. He suffered Lucy to pass, but when John attempted to go by, the dog made at him open-mouthed with such fury that he was compelled to run back into the inner vault.

"Speak to him, Lucy," he cried; "pacify the dog or he will tear me to pieces."

Then Lucy tried to pacify the dog, stroked his bristly hair, hung about his shaggy neck, and prayed him to be quiet.

"Now, John," she cried, "while I hold him!" And he essayed again. But Scipio sprang from her weak grasp, and flew madly at the curate once more, so that he was obliged to give back. Standing in the narrow doorway, the dog held the command of the inner room, and defied his prisoner to escape.

"Oh, what shall we do, John?" cried Lucy, despairingly. "John, I won't leave you; we will die together;" and she passed into the inner room and put her arms round him.

"I won't die!" cried John, who was all of a shiver with fear and excitement. "That villainous dog! It is your brother who has murdered me. Help! help!"

He began to shout and cry out incoherently; Lucy wrung her hands in despair. The dressing-gown—she had thrown over her—the loose Indian gown—had almost fallen from her white shoulders; the dog had trodden upon it, and still held a corner of it under his foot. With an instinct of maidenly modesty Lucy tried to gather it about her. The dog growled, but having sniffed at the robe, let it go indifferently. Then in a moment an idea seized her. She took off the gown, and threw it over her lover's shoulders. It enveloped him like a cloak.

"Now, John," she cried, "he is blind; he can only tell by scent. Now try him, dear, and God bless you!"

John seized the idea at once, and marched forth. Scipio sniffed all round him suspiciously, seemed puzzled, growled doubtfully, but let him pass.

"Come, Lucy," cried John, when he had safely reached the outer vault. He can't come."

Lucy passed him too, and Scipio, confounded at

this manœuvre, began to bark furiously into the now empty room, as though challenging his prisoner to come forth.

"Up the ladder," cried Lucy; "there is a window open!"

But between them and the window was a chasm of fire. They were cut away altogether from the outer world. There was only the choice before them—fire or water—to burn or to drown.

The tide was plashing sullenly beneath them in its narrow channel. The heat was becoming insupportable. A little more, and life would fail them altogether.

"Is there an entrance to the river?" cried John, hoarsely.

"There is an archway, but it is under water."

"No matter, I can dive," cried John.

"Then go, jump into the stream, and dive under the archway; you will be in the river then, and there are sure to be boats. Good-by, John."

"Hang it! no, I can't leave you," cried John, in indecision.

"You must, John; you can't save me; and you are bound to do it. Think of your father," panted out Lucy, and then sank to the ground.

But John had had time to think; the first instinctive movement to self-preservation he had repressed. He was not physically a coward, and he felt that it would degrade him to escape himself and leave Lucy to perish. And yet, Lucy was fainting—was almost insensible. If she was dead, it would be his duty to save himself. Well, she was as good as dead; the pang of death was over with her; and it was horrible to die by fire. His thoughts hung upon a balance that a breath might turn either way.

Suddenly a head protruded itself from the dark turbid water, and a dripping arm reached upward to the sill of the outer doorway of the vault. The apparition was so wonderful and unexpected that Jones involuntarily gave a shout, half of joy, half of wonder.

"Hello! are you there? Are you Jones the curate? That's right. I'm Markwood," said the head. "Come along! there isn't a moment to lose. Can you dive? That's right; in with you after me, and under the archway. I've a boat outside."

"But Lucy's here," cried John, coming to his senses—"Lucy Hulse."

"O Lord!" said Markwood. "That's serious. How shall we manage? There's room for one to dive under the archway, but not for two. What can we do?"

"We must save ourselves," said John, hoarsely. "Lucy is insensible."

What was it right to do? Half a moment to decide on what might puzzle a jury of casuists for a twelvemonth! Markwood thought of his motherless babes; he thought of all that was hanging on to his life. It was his duty no doubt to save himself, and leave Lucy to perish, but he couldn't do it.

A roar and turmoil overhead, as if the world were coming to an end. Markwood instinctively ducked under the water, John drew back within the vault. There was a shower of hot, burning bricks; the side of the warehouse had fallen in with a huge crash; they were likely to be buried in the ruins. Happily the wall was solid and well built, and a portion of it, holding together in a mass, had fallen across the channel of the stream, and had formed a sort of roof over it and the fall had broken down the archway. There was now a great gap there, open to the sky and the stars.

"That facilitates matters," said Markwood, coming up to the surface, spluttering. "Lower the girl into the water, and we'll each take an arm."

It was no easy matter to win through all the fiery floating debris, encumbered as they were with the senseless form of Lucy, but they did win through it; and presently a couple of black heads appeared at the gunwale of the boat, leaving a ripple of seething water behind them.

"It is a miracle," said Patty, clasping her hands in thankfulness.

Margaret was strong and capable, and Lucy was quickly dragged into the boat over the stern. The two men followed.

"Does she live?" whispered John, tremulously.

"There is no sign of life," cried Patty, "but let us hope. Pull quickly for the shore."

Just then the lower part of the warehouse collapsed and fell in with a great noise; but over all the turmoil of falling building could be heard a cry of pain and terror, almost human in its piteousness.

"I forgot Scipio," said Markwood, looking anxiously into the blazing crater of fire. "Poor dog, it is all over with him now."

"Poor Scipio!" said Patty; "he was faithful to the last."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE END OF ALL THINGS.

MR. BRASS, the detective, was abroad early in the morning after the fire. He had all his work cut out in the way of getting together sufficient evidence to justify the magistrate in remanding the prisoner—for he was to be brought up at the Thames Police Court that very morning. The fire at Ebbsfleet had given him materials for thought, but nothing could be done in that quarter now. The ruins were still red-hot, and would not be accessible for some days. Nor did Mr. Brass expect any important revelations from Ebbsfleet; his belief was strong in the deal box with the tin lining, which was to be opened in the morning in the presence of the chief surgeon of the police force. He had given Edward Hulse great credit for his sagacity in regard to that box.

"It's difficult to work a murder case without a body," said Mr. Brass to himself; "but when you carries it along with you, why, naturally, you nonplush everybody."

Mr. Brass had come to know that Patty Robinson was the last person who had seen the curate of St. Saveall's alive. She was an adverse witness, too, the suspected man being her sweetheart; but if she could be got to speak to having seen him enter Ebbsfleet on the night of his disappearance, it would be a great point. Mr. Brass, therefore, resolved to see her himself, and ascertain how the land lay.

On his way to Trinity Square he passed the Tower, an edifice he held in a good deal of contempt.

"Them was dark ages indeed, when the poor creatures had no better prison than that to be put in. Talk of your grenadiers and your beef-eaters—bah! Why, the crown jewels ain't safe among 'em. The magsmen'll nobble the ryegalia some of these days, and there'll be a nice job for us to work out; leastways, if they be there, which I doubt. They say as all the jewels and gold are locked up in the Bank of England, and so there ain't nothing here but duffers for the public to gape at. And it's likely enough. I wouldn't trust them bear-skinned chaps with nothing else. Holding out their guns and whispering rubbish to one another, and then parading up and down like so many tomcats—Lord! I ain't patience with 'em."

This was the view taken of the military by a civilian, who, perhaps, was unduly biased by professional jealousy.

When Mr. Brass arrived at the corner house where Mrs. Robinson lived and let lodgings, he found standing by the curb opposite her door a neat little brougham, with a useful, hard-working horse in the shafts, and a patient-looking coachman on the box. Unmistakably a doctor's brougham; and as the door opened, and a man descended briskly the steps, it was enough to see that he was the owner of the conveyance, and a medical practitioner.

Mr. Brass, with that ready civility which was characteristic of him, opened the door of the brougham for the doctor to enter, and touched his hat.

"How's the young lady this morning, sir?" he cried.

The doctor shook his head: "High fever—great prostration—hope the best." Then he took up the *Lancet* that was lying on the front seat, and was presently lost to view.

Mr. Brass had jumped to the conclusion that Patty was the person for whom the doctor was in attendance.

"It's been too much for her, poor gal," was the muttered reflection as he tapped gently at his door.

Mrs. Robinson, her hair tightly wound up in curl-papers, looking very fierce and restive, opened the door a few inches, and peeped out.

"Well, how's your young lady by this time, Mrs. Robinson?" said Mr. Brass, benignantly.

"Who wants to know?" cried Mrs. Robinson.

"What's your business, sir, if you please?"

"Well, I wanted a few words with her," said Brass, jerking his thumb toward his shoulder; "but, as she's so poorly, poor gal—"

"And pray who told you she was poorly, and whom do you want to see; and what's your business?"

"Patty Robinson," said Mr. Brass, becoming stiff all of a sudden. "I'm Inspector Brass, of the City Police, and I want to see your daughter on important business; and if she ain't fit to be seen, I must have a doctor's certificate to that effect."

Mrs. Robinson slammed the door in his face, and Mr. Brass heard or saw nothing more for about five minutes. Then the door opened, and Patty Robinson stood before him.

"Well, Mr. Brass," she said, "what do you want?"

The detective was quite startled. He had made up his mind that his witness was ill in bed, and here she was before him in full health and vigor.

"I have a few questions to ask of you on a matter of importance, miss, and perhaps I'd better step in and speak to you in private."

"Come in, Mr. Brass," said Patty. "Don't make a noise, please, because we've a young lady here very ill."

Patty led the way into the dining-room, a dingy chamber on the ground floor.

"Now, miss," said Mr. Brass, taking out his notebook, and putting on his most professional aspect, "have the goodness to tell me if you know a gentleman of the name of John Jones, the curate of St. Saveall's?"

"Certainly I do," said Patty.

"And when was the last time you saw him? Mind, miss, I know all about the matter, and you'll be examined on oath by-and-by."

"Let me see," said Patty, knitting her brows and pursing up her mouth. "I couldn't speak exactly."

"But you must speak exactly, do you hear? I know the whole thing, miss; so speak out, and speak the truth."

"Well, Mr. Brass, it might be five minutes ago, or it might be ten; but I think it was something betwixt and between."

"Come, no nonsense," said Brass, savagely; "I don't come here to be made a fool of."

"If it's so particular that you shouldn't be made a fool of," said Patty, "I'll go and look at the clock; but I shouldn't think a minute or two would make the difference. Or, stay! perhaps you'd like to see him yourself, as he is likely to know his own business best?"

Mr. Brass was too much nonplused to reply, and Patty slipped out, and presently there entered a young man in clerical apparel looking very pale and haggard, but still composed and calm.

"You want to see me, Mr. Inspector Brass," he said, looking calmly at him. "I am John Jones, the curate of St. Saveall's."

"Come, I'm blessed!" muttered Mr. Brass between his teeth; "there's some kid about this. Well, sir," he said, aloud, "I'm not acquainted with your person, sir, and if you are what you say, I must observe that you've played a very cruel trick on your father and Sir Pantlin; yes, sir, and tried to defeat the ends of justice, sir!"

"I don't understand you," said Jones, with hauteur. "I have been away from home for a few days, and I find that a great fuss has been made, and several innocent people put to great distress. I hope the officers of justice are prepared to justify the extraordinary steps they have taken."

"I have acted under instructions, sir," said Mr. Brass, stiffly. "Precious good job I took that indemnity," he muttered to himself. "Come, sir, I suppose you'll have no objection to go along with me to Fenton's Hotel to be identified by the archdeacon?"

"They're coming here directly," said Jones; "I've sent for them. You don't mind my leaving you for a few moments, but I am in great anxiety just now. A young lady, to whom I am deeply attached, is lying betwixt life and death."

"Not Miss Lucy, sir?" cried Brass. "Well, I'm sorry for that, sir. She was very fond of you, sir, you may take your davy. Perhaps you know that I've got a prisoner in custody along of this ere job? The young lady's brother—no other—locked up in Newgate."

"What, Edward Hulse? Why, I was told he had started for America."

"So he had, sir, but we brought him back."

"That's fortunate, for one thing. You must bring him down here; she's been calling most piteously for her brother."

Mr. Brass rubbed his forehead meditatively.

"Well, sir, as things is as they is, I don't see as there is any objection to that. I suppose, as expense is no particular object, and cabs—"

"Use the utmost expedition, Mr. Brass, without regard to expense," cried John, following Mr. Brass to the door, opening it gently, and standing on the steps outside. "Ah, here comes my father."

The archdeacon and Sir Pantlin at this moment hurried up to the door. "John! John! Oh, where have you been?" cried the archdeacon.

"Yes, you dog!" shouted Sir Pantlin. "What do you mean by it? Come, explain yourself."

John put his fingers to his lips.

"Hush!" he said. "Lucy is lying here betwixt life and death."

Mr. Brass meanwhile had hastened to Newgate. He has some little preliminary difficulty in obtaining the release of Edward Hulse; but with the aid of one of the visiting justices, who happened to be in the prison, this is soon arranged, and the two are presently hastening toward Tower Hill.

"One thing puzzles me," said Mr. Brass. "What's in that box as you took so much pains about?"

"Only a camera and some photographic apparatus. I meant to set up in that line in the States."

"Oh, that's all, is it? And was that what you meant it for from the first?"

To this question, however, Edward deliberately turned a deaf ear.

Lucy was lying sick unto death in the best bed room of the Robinsons' house in Trinity Square. The exposure and excitement she had undergone had overmastered the current of her life. A pale city flower, she withered away under the stormy blasts that had been loosened upon her. Everything that her heart might desire waited for her; the husband of her choice, sweeter to her by far than the most chivalrous and unselfish of the outer world, comparative wealth, and the power of bestowing happiness; but she could not raise her hand to gather these gifts—she had got her death-blow, and could not rally against it.

And in her weakness and collapse her ideas ran once more in the channels of her girlhood and maiden life; the intrusive passion that had turned her thoughts another way had lost its all-engrossing power; she yearned for the accustomed faces—for her father and her brother, but chiefly for the latter, and for him she incessantly called, in the semidelirium of her sinking state. She seemed full of strange remorse and terror, and would not be pacified by any of them. Her mother watched by her bedside; her lover was constantly in and out.

She turned away peevishly from these, and called continually for Edward.

Presently John came up with a shade of satisfaction in his face. He made his way on tip-toe to the head of the bed where Lucy was lying, her tangled hair scattered over the pillow, her great restless eyes throwing wandering glances from side to side, a hectic flush on each cheek, the rest of her face pale and colorless.

"Edward is coming," he whispered, and seated himself by her side, taking her waxen hand in his. Her eyes grew less restless, and settled upon the face of her lover; there was the faintest smile upon her wan lips; he felt the feeblest pressure from the hand he held in his.

The time seemed long waiting. The sounds from the outer world of life came with strange distinctness and new meaning into the hushed chamber. The passing wheels, the postman's sounding knock, the cries of the costermongers, a ringing bugle-call from the Towerward—these sounds broke into the sad, dull thoughts of the watchers with a sharp, distressful ring about them, reminding them of the small account their sharpest heart-pangs were to the great living world without.

He came at last; a cab stopped at the door, and an eager voice was heard outside asking for his "sister." His footstep was on the staircase; he entered, and Lucy seemed to revive at the sound, and half

sat up in bed, stretching out her arms eagerly toward the door.

"Ned," she cried, as he put his arm round her and kissed her, "do you you forgive me?"

"If I have ought to forgive, I do."

"You have a great deal to forgive; but, Ned, it has all seemed like a troubled dream, and one does things in dreams that would seem impossible at other times. Is father here?"

"No; he has sailed—for America."

"You will follow him, Ned, and tell him, when you see him, that I sent my best love to him; and kiss me, Ned. I'm tired—oh, so tired."

She sank back on the pillow, quite exhausted, and lay for a while as still as if she were really dead; but presently she revived a little, and John asked her if she would like his father to come and pray at her bedside. She assented with a sweet smile. Presently the archdeacon's gray head was bowed against the bright-checked counterpane, and he read the prayers of the Church in a low, broken voice.

After that Lucy whispered that she would like to be alone with John; and everybody else withdrew.

"Feel in the pocket, John, of the dress that hangs on the wall yonder; there is a letter," she whispered.

He felt in the pocket of the dress with a strange mingled feeling. Among the confused assortment of a girl's treasures—a thimble, a silver-mounted tape measure he had given her, an almanac as big as a thumb-nail, and a little case that held needle and thread and scissors that had often been used for his benefit, as with deft fingers she would replace some missing button on wrist or neck-band—there, too, was a letter, his own letter, as he recognized with a flush of shame, the letter of renunciation that he had hoped had been destroyed.

"Tear it up, John," she said, "destroy it. Let the thought of it never come between us; for you will think of me sometimes, John, when I am gone. It was a cruel letter, John, but you had repented of it, and you were coming to see me just as usual. I'm so glad of that."

Lucy seemed to sleep, with John's hand in hers; and presently she awoke, and looked wildly about her.

"John," she cried, in a hoarse whisper, "things are very hard. Why are they so hard? Is there no help? John, can't you help me? Keep me, John, keep me with you; don't let me go! Oh!"

Life was ebbing away in waves, as it were—little difference from moment to moment, but then a wave, and lo! a great recession; the soul that looks out from those glazing eyes farther and farther away. Who can save? Who can help? The dim inevitable presence hovering there is inexorable. The paralyzing hand—the cold, destroying hand, cruel, remorseless—will it lift a finger for all our tears and prayers?

Draw the curtains closely to, and leave the cold, solemn chamber to solitude and silence. The end has come, and there is little of consolation left, except to know that it shall also come for us in good time with merciful oblivion.

Sorrows come in like the tide; a long space of comparative calm, and then billow after billow. Hardly had Edward Hulse realized the fact of his sister's death, when the news came to him of his father's. An account of the catastrophe on board the steamer had been brought home by a passing vessel, and made some little sensation, Mr. Bilfil having been a well known man, and the manner of his death remarkable. It was a great comfort to Edward Hulse, however, to find that Patty Robinson had been safe at home all the time of his absence, and that the plaid shawl that had caused him so much anguish of mind had, at that particular time, adorned the shoulders of Mr. Bilfil's lawful wife. There was considerable pleasure, too, in the discovery that a codicil had been found to Gilbert Paston's will, and that John Jones had succeeded in saving from the fire this very satisfactory document. At the same time it added poignancy to his grief that Lucy was not alive to share the good fortune.

The validity of the codicil was duly established; and as soon as the matter admitted of no doubt, Edward married his sweetheart, Patty, in a very quiet way; and they settled down in a comfortable house in the northwest of London. Edward bought a share in a good practice, and is now a wealthy, respected citizen.

Mrs. Bilfil, released from the irksome bonds of an unsuitable alliance, tempted fortune again, bestowing her hand upon Markwood, and becoming a mother to his five children. To her husband she is a source of pride, warm affection and constant disquietude. Being a man, however, of great aptitude for affairs, he gets through his life with satisfaction and success; but he has less time than of old to devote to other people's business. It is satisfactory to add that, partly in consideration of his new connection, and partly as reward for long and faithful services, Mr. Paston, his employer, has raised his salary considerably, which is a marvelous thing, when you come to think of it.

John Jones is now rector of Pumptristaint, and engaged to be married to his cousin—a lady of faded personal attractions, but with a very nice freehold farm or two, which will nick in very nicely to Sir Pantlin's estate, should that worthy baronet—who has no male heirs—bequeath, as everybody supposes he will, his property to his godson.

One of the pleasantest uses that Edward can make of his good fortune is to entertain with sumptuous hospitality his old friend Markwood. Mrs. Markwood does not often visit them, as she and Patty don't agree very well. Perhaps Patty is a little overbearing, being a woman of importance now, whose favorable opinion might make the fortune of a briefless barrister; for her husband places great reliance upon her judgment, and is guided in most things by

her advice. But when Markwood can steal an odd evening in the long vacation sometimes, when all the women-folk are out of town, and enjoy a dinner alone with his old friend Ned Hulse, he is in the very tip-top of pleasant enjoyment.

"Tell you what," said Markwood, on one of these occasions—he was admirably contemplating the color of a bumper of '47 port, holding it against the light—"when I first saw you and your wife that was to be together on board the steamboat that day, I never thought that any good would come of it. No more there does, generally, in unequal marriages. But after all, the great thing is to get a woman to suit you, and one that will go with you through thick and thin. And having found her, Ned, you naturally stick to her, as she stuck to you—through fire and water."

THE END.

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